THEIR HOUR UPON THE STAGE

BY
JAMES AGATE

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JAMES AGATE

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To
Frank Whitworth
because of
An Evening and a Morning
with the
Hesperides Society

FOREWORD

This is how this book came about. On a recent evening I lectured till the small hours to a little Society in Cambridge. At breakfast I continued lecturing, taking for my theme the futility of dramatic criticism ; let no young man looking to a bright career contemplate that dark entry. I dwelt on the impermanence of this black art, adducing the fact that my laboriously compiled CONTEMPORARY THEATRE, 1927–30 *had gone the unavailing round of London publishers. I was interrupted by a young man saying modestly : " I wonder, sir "—it is odd how respect for crabbed age returns to youth in the morning !—" if you would be offended if I published your book ? " The result of my not being offended was that the Mandarin Press was founded. My blessings on its youthful pow !*

To lighten the burden on young shoulders, I have made a smaller book which does not pretend to be a comprehensive history. If the extracts have any connecting thread it is that they deal with acting seen on the London stage during the past four years. Here and there will be found something concerning the drama of those years, for, with the players' leave, the play cannot be wholly ignored.

There remains an unpublished moiety, more concerned with plays than with acting. This could be entitled DREAMING SPIRES. *Will Another University please copy ?*

J. A.

Beaconsfield,
November, 1930.

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THE TACTICS OF NIGEL

"The Beaux' Stratagem": a comedy. By George Farquhar. Lyric Theatre, 20 January, 1927.

"It is my ambition," said Mr. Playfair (now Sir Nigel Playfair), as the curtain fell on this brilliant revival, "to restore the old English comedies to the place to which they rightly belong, the English theatre." Those were fair words, and the audience cheered them. But it takes two to realise an ambition of this sort; in addition to the restorer there must be a public to connive at the restoration. Mr. Playfair will forgive me if I say that in this matter he is very much in the position of the auctioneer at a horse-sale who, pointing to some noble beast curvetting and caracoling in the straw, can do no more than say: "Gentlemen, I leave the animal in your hands." The revival of this famous piece is something more than an occasion for adding to your collector's bag. Farquhar's comedy is no mere curio. You may get greater zest from it if you are fortunate enough to have some instruction in literary genealogy. You may conjecture that if Congreve was Sheridan's father, Farquhar counts Goldsmith among his immediate issue. You may hazard that in the scene in which he dissolves the marriage between the Sullens Farquhar shows an understanding of that tie which is two hundred years before his time. You may reflect upon the foolish sayings of the wise, and recall Pope's "What pert, low dialogue has Farquhar writ!" It may entertain you to remember Taine's misunderstanding: "On a passé une heure, et violà tout; le divertissement vous laisse vide, et n'est bon que pour occuper les soirées de coquettes et de fats." The point is that you may journey to Hammersmith unencumbered by any of this academic baggage, and be sure of a delightful play which demands nothing for its appreciation except your own untrammelled mind. Mr. Playfair would be well advised not to confuse the public with the restoration issue. Let him announce simply: "The best show in London." He has produced the play perfectly.

The last production of *The Beaux' Stratagem* on the grand scale was in 1879, at which period English playwrights seem to have been considerably exercised as to the propriety of revivals. Thus we find Boucicault writing: "I no more desire to see the defunct dramatist occupying the stage than I wish to see my grandfather rise out of his respected tomb and reclaim my inheritance." To which a critic of the period retorted that not everyone was in a position to regard the public stage as his own private property. This particular revival appears to have been a low-spirited affair, largely marred by the fact that the part of Mrs. Sullen was entrusted to a soubrette instead of an actress possessed of the grand manner. The part was originally played by Mrs. Oldfield, and I found myself wondering on Thursday evening whether an actress living and playing in the first years of the eighteenth century could have had her successor's exquisite period-sense. The answer, surely, must be in the negative. To Oldfield 1707 was not a period but the time of day, and Mrs. Sullen was to be seen in any box at Covent Garden. Given that the older actress's emotional, intellectual and aesthetic equipment was equal to that of her successor, to what extent can the two performances be identical? For Miss Evans brings to the part more than faithfulness; she brings also a knowledge of that which only a very few years ago it was fashionable to call emancipation, and an implication of the altered relationship between the sexes. No actor, though he be steeped in Pirandello to the very lips, can make Aimwell and Archer other than the high-spirited sparks of Farquhar's imagining. Is it fancy, reason, or the intoxication of the delighted sense which, as we gaze at the new Mrs. Sullen, makes one see her double? Does not Miss Evans set beside her literal presentation something which we might call a critical estimate, a revision of the character as seen through modern eyes? Does she not bring to the modish ornament a delicacy and perception which were no part of the feminine equipment of Farquhar's day? Take her very first words. Dorinda says: "Morrow, my dear sister; are you for church this morning?" I find it hard to believe that Oldfield's "Anywhere to pray" can have had behind it an impertinence, a malice,

and a scorn which would not have been out of place in the mouth of Clara Middleton or any other six-foot of Meredithian womanhood legging it healthily to her devotions over six miles of hill and dale. Must not the eighteenth-century actress have filled with a sense of present injury the passage beginning : " O, sister, sister ! If ever you marry, beware of a sullen, silent sot," instead of informing it, as Miss Evans does, with the amused recollection of a chatteldom that is past ? These may be vain imaginings ; but one reflects that the beauty of an exquisite performance is far-reaching, and may open more avenues than the artist suspects. The love-scene with Archer was played with the last refinement of wit and spirit, and it was a pin-still house which marvelled as the actress breathed out the closing passage : " Look ye, sister, I have no supernatural gifts—I can't swear I could resist temptation ; though I can safely promise to avoid it ; and that's as much as the best of us can do." I will vouch for it that here was an emotion which the dramatist never glimpsed. Yet to this modern quality was added one older than Farquhar : the actress having divested herself of her hoop, the bosom upon which she sighed became Celia's, and round about them rose up the Forest of Arden. Great playing has this merit, that it makes the mind free of time and space, and sends the imagination of the spectator blowing where it listeth.

There was a moment of something resembling pathos when Miss Evans recited the epilogue in which the dying playwright pleaded for his play. Sir Edmund Gosse has told us that Farquhar was half actor and quarter poet, to which one would add that in the practical business of living he was a whole and complete failure. He knew the value of money to the last farthing and expired in a garret without one. In spite of seven plays, all of which were reasonably successful, he died at the age of twenty-nine " leaving nothing to perpetuate my memory but two helpless girls." The playwright was as wrong in his estimate of his genius as about everything else. As an actor he could not pretend to kill a fellow-player without wounding him so badly that he had to give up the stage. As a wife-hunter he could not marry a rich woman without

finding out after marriage that she hadn't a penny. As a soldier he could not sell out of one regiment on a ducal promise of a captaincy in another without hitting upon a duke who did not keep promises. And he left two comedies, not knowing them to be immortal.

Nothing being duller than undiluted panegyric, let me say that it was unkind of Mr. Playfair to cast introspective Mr. James Whale for that pure blockhead and dolt, Squire Sullen, and still unkinder to entrust the part of Dorinda to an actress of insufficient experience, thus leaving Miss Evans high and dry without anybody to play to. In compensation Mr. Playfair himself delighted inordinately, and had the co-operation of Messrs. George Hayes, Scott Russell, and Miles Malleson, while Mesdames Winifred Evans and Dorothy Hope were perfectly agreeable.

RUSSIA WITHOUT TCHEHOV

"The Greater Love": a drama. By J. B. Fagan. Princes Theatre, 23 February, 1927.

One recognises that a big vessel takes a certain time to get under way. This being so, how shall we be impatient when the vessel putting off is none other than the Russian ship of state, as it was rigged in 1905? A pleasant allegory suggests itself here: our passenger-list shall be the play's characters, the hand-luggage their personal histories, and the trunks in the hold the play's ideas. Let it be said at once that all the baggage in this piece is labelled "Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt," and that the captain's name is Sardou, unrivalled navigator in shallow, complicated waters. Unrivalled when we note how for two solid hours Mr. Fagan tacks and puts about without making headway. All that he has established up to the end of his second act is that Count Pestoff is a conspirator, that his son Vassili, to redeem gaming debts, has betrayed his father's band of conspirators, that the tell-tale letter is in the pocket of the drunken officer engaged to Vassili's sister, Nadeshda Ivanovna, at whom the Chief of the Secret Police has been making eyes. Not much progress here. But since Nadeshda is played by Miss Thorndike we guess that the play will ultimately centre in the soul-state of this young woman who, up to the present, has done nothing except recite for inadequate reasons a verse of her brother's poetry, pawn her rubies, and invite the Chief of Police to behave himself. Compare the maelstroms, cataracts, whirlpools, and vortices in which Sardou ducks and souses his heroines in a quarter of the time. But one realises that Miss Thorndike was biding hers like a rocket on the fourth of November. There was plenty of excitement in the third act, which took place in the Governor's room in the Kremlin. And here I must pause to say something about that very remarkable young actor, Mr. Charles Laughton. Mr. Laughton has played, to my knowledge, three parts in London—the clerk in *The Cherry Orchard*, the wastrel in *Liliom*, and now this Russian Governor. To my knowledge, I say, but only

because of the programme. In each part this actor has been at once superb and unrecognisable, achieving his differences not by inessential wiggery but by seizing the essence of the character and making his body conform. This is character-acting as the great and not the little masters of that art have always understood it. To watch this sleek, polite, overfed tyrant wake from eupeptic slumber to smile a possible assassin to exile in Siberia—this was to be told something authentic about the Tsarist terror. Pleasures too refined and cruelties too barbarous were in the flutter of those sleepy eyelids, the modulations of the indolent, caressing voice, the slow-moving, velvet hands. Now I am not going to make a song about three performances and proclaim Mr. Laughton a great actor on the strength of them. But I will say this, that whenever he has been on the stage my eyes have never left him, and that on Wednesday night his silent abstractions held more of Russia than all the talkers put together.

It was something of a disappointment when one found that the play's *scène à faire* passed this actor by. Instead, we had the alarums and excursions usual when incriminating letters are held by a Chief of Police, and a lily maid would have him give them up. First, Nadeshda offered that sacrifice about which the first dramatist probably wrote the first play, and the Chief of Police accepted it. Having accepted, he changed his mind, being moved, presumably, by a vision of Nadeshda floating face upward on the Neva in pursuance of lady-like, heroical resolve, and being posted at the local Police Station as a Body awaiting Identification. When he declined, Nadeshda broke into tears, possibly on the discovery that if her policeman was a gentleman he was certainly no officer, since he tore up the letter and let the assassins continue. Ultimately the policeman went to Siberia, and after some chaffering in the magnanimities Nadeshda, who really loved him, went there too, and it was very cold, and love is a fire which can warm two hearts as cheaply as one, and so forth, and so on. But there was a horrid five minutes during which one feared that Nadeshda wasn't going to get her policeman even by fair means. Nadeshda, when once she got going, was obviously a part to tear a cat in,

and Miss Thorndike split and rent whole tribes of *felidae*, while managing to retain every appearance of rationality. The part had one moment of sincerity—when Nadeshda realised her brother's weakness—and to this moment perfect value was given. But the swooning and the transports were not altogether convincing, and the part offered little scope for the actress's finer brand of spiritual magnetism. The exotic languors and molten grace, the purring and scratching of a Bernhardt are essential to these man-eating leopardesses who would induce Russian Chiefs of Police to change their spots. Miss Thorndike, whose art invites to homelier raptures, was magnificently reasonable throughout, but one would have preferred her to be less reasonable and more magnificent. What is the use of melodramatic Russia if you cannot sweep through it in tea-gowns of Babylonish allurement?

Miss Thorndike wore a dress of modest drab and behaved like a woman of sense. But, again, is sense the wear for femininity braving a barrack-room at midnight? Are not sables the only cloak for virtue in such cases? It is true that this actress wore furs, but then again they were furs of reasonable dimensions, whereas Sarah's, when she played Fédora, trailed behind her to the length of several versts. In this Russia of Mr. Fagan "after" Sardou, governesses should look like princesses, and princesses like prima donnas. Miss Thorndike will forgive me if I say that she wasn't nearly scrumptious enough, that she was too much like life, that Jane Clegg can never be Ivanovna Cleggorovitch. Messrs. George Bealby and Henry Hewitt galvanised bits of the play into melodramatic life, Messrs. Lawrence Hanray and Brember Wills seemed to wonder what, in Tchehov's name, they were supposed to be up to, Mr. Colin Keith-Johnston's part kept giving way under him, Mr. Lewis Casson looked like knout and cat-o'-nine-tails in one, and Miss Ada King wandered disconsolate about the stage. Mr. Basil Gill, after endowing his Chief of Police with a coal-black voice, seemed to hesitate between the Scarpia of Sardou and the Elijah of Mendelssohn; but it was an unsatisfactory character, and Mr. Gill did the most that was possible with it.

THE NEW VIOLA

"Twelfth Night": By Shakespeare. St. James's Theatre, 17 May, 1927.

To anyone gravelled for new thoughts on this old delight Dr. Johnson's Preface to the Plays is a convenient refuge. It would be a pity to forget the jealous belittlement of: "Shakespeare has scenes of undoubted and perpetual excellence, but perhaps not one play which, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to the conclusion." Or the unctuosity of: "It may be said of Shakespeare that from his works may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence." Or the Podsnappery of: "The marriage of Olivia, and the succeeding perplexity, though well enough contrived to divert on the stage, wants credibility, and fails to produce the proper instruction required in the drama, as it exhibits no just picture of life." Sufficient comment upon this gem is the Doctor's own: "I could have written longer notes, for the art of writing notes is not a difficult attainment."

He who laughs at Johnson should beware lest he in his turn provoke laughter. Tentatively, then, let it be asked whether playgoer was ever entirely satisfied with the poet's scurvy treatment of Viola at the end? Viola, the tenderest and truest, most loyal and most wistful of all Shakespeare's heroines, with a heart ready to burst in her bosom yet carrying out Orsino's mission in the letter and the spirit—Viola, the apple of every true playgoer's eye, whose transient unhappiness is hardly to be borne, is left when happiness comes at last without utterance in which to express it. Of the thousand lines which Ben Jonson wished that Shakespeare had blotted, the first to be erased might well be Viola's last. Orsino has bidden his page put on her woman's weeds, whereupon the poor wretch must exhale:—

> The captain, that did bring me first on shore,
> Hath my maid's garments: he, upon some action,
> Is now in durance; at Malvolio's suit,
> A gentleman, and follower of my lady's.

The rest of her is silence. Even when the Duke declares categorically : " You shall from this time be your master's mistress ! " Viola must remain mum. Well, one cannot have everything, and it is to be supposed that if Shakespeare's genius had been humanly careful instead of divinely careless, we should have paid other penalty. We might, for example, have had to sacrifice : " When that I was and a little tiny boy," which is surely the most impertinent jewel in the crown of poetry. Nevertheless, one is always something wounded by the slighting of Viola. " Je n'offenserai pas la mémoire de Molière," wrote Scribe's collaborator, Legouvé, " en disant qu'en général il ne dénoue pas ses pièces, il les finit." The same charge may be preferred against Shakespeare in this play.

The piece was given on two afternoons only, for the benefit of the Sadler's Wells Fund. Apart from the fact that fifteen members of a great stage family, headed by Sir Johnstone himself, made a gallant appearance, chief interest centred in the Viola of Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson. Exactly how good this young actress is preoccupies us all. I respectfully suggest that to lavish the attributes and title of greatness upon a talent which, however rare and precious in promise, is still immature is to do that talent injury. It is just because I think so highly of this young artist, and because she moves me so deeply, that I deprecate the praise to which only genius fully grown is entitled. Of her Viola let it be sufficient to say that every word, tone, overtone, look, gesture, and implication, gives promise of and is consistent with a great actress to come. Those of us who have known a Bernhardt or a Duse at her zenith only have read with an ache the lovely tales of these great players at their budding. Of Bernhardt in 1875, during her last years at the Théâtre-Français, William Archer wrote : " She was certainly an exquisite creature." These are our young actress's first years in any theatre, and it is our happiness to know and declare that she to-day is certainly an exquisite creature, whose talent is yet just opening. It is customary to remark of young players that as they mature they will achieve a deeper note. The reverse is what one hopes for Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson, who, though complete mistress of the twilit world, has

not yet achieved sunshine. Her Juliet had no gaiety, but in Viola one was glad to note something of that light-heartedness which is expressly enjoined in Olivia's "I heard you were saucy at my gate." From pertness, which is the defect of this quality, the young actress's extraordinary sense of beauty must ever absolve her, and she is the first Viola I have known to refrain from haggard assumptions of boy-and-girlishness at the lines: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, And all the brothers, too." The simplicity with which this was said went directly to all hearts. I need not stress this actress's ethereal quality. Curiously enough, you hardly noticed her entrances; her presence came over the play like the sweet south, stealing and giving fragrance. Rightly she declaimed as a set piece the famous passage beginning: "Make me a willow cabin at your gate." This and the boyish *forfanterie* of her exits seemed to me to mark her first reachings out after definite histrionic achievement as distinct from self-communing overheard.

SECOND-HAND PINERO

"The Golden Calf": a play. By H. M. Harwood. Globe Theatre, 14 September, 1927.

Sir Timothy Cardale, Baronet (Mr. E. Vivian Reynolds), lives precariously on the edge of Doncaster's Town Moor —precariously, since if he fails to find the favourite for the St. Leger, a notoriously difficult race, he cannot pay his butler's wages. Sir Thomas has married rank if not money. Lady Mabel Cardale (Miss Mabel Terry-Lewis), insisting upon open house for the benefit of two unmarried daughters, inveigles into intimate week-ends Reuben Manassa (Mr. Raymond Massey), one of the friendlier natives of the Levant and a high financier, and Lord Langford (Mr. Rupert Lister), a wealthy newspaper proprietor. Where this otherwise astute lady makes her mistake is in also inviting those younger and more personable bachelors—Alan Trent (Mr. Ivan Samson) and Brian Monro (Mr. Nicholas Hannen). Trent, possessed of yellow hair and creaseless manners, bemoans an unremunerative post connected with the Stock Exchange; Monro, Public School and Army, tired of living the Rolls-Royce life on a Ford income, hints at that last extremity —a job. Thus Iris (Miss Betty Schuster), as to whom there is no hurry, and Barbara (Miss Margaret Bannerman), who is beginning to be nervous of the word "shelf," have four suitors to choose from. Suddenly there falls into Monro's lap a bolt from the Mexican blue. Will he construct a railway from Zacapoaxtia to Aquascalientes? Won't he just! The next train for Mexico leaves in half an hour. Can he catch it? As easy as railway-building! He is about to bid Barbara, whom he loves, await their union until he has joined the two unmentionable towns, when an impatient motor reminds him that time, tide, and the L.M.S. wait for no man—not even a Mexican eagle. He departs, unhanding Barbara who threatens to let him. And now Manassa, with stealthy pace and Tarquin's ravishing strides, moves like a ghost towards his design, which is Barbara. Whereupon, and clutching

any wisp to take the present horror from the time, that maiden bethinks her of the straw-haired Trent. "Congratulate us!" she says, simply. Manassa, jutting forth a malicious beard and curling back unpleasant lips, discloses rows of wolfish Levantine teeth. The first-act curtain falls.

The rest of the play is pure Pinero without that playwright's deft accomplishment. Barbara is Iris all over again, while Manassa is Maldonado. It is two years later, and the Trents are giving an evening party. We judge from Barbara's frock, the tapestried walls, the casual lavishness of the champagne, and the fact that the hired band is conversant with "Rosenkavalier," that the ménage cannot be spending less than fifteen thousand a year. Now we know that Trent's brains cannot at the most be answerable for more than fifteen hundred. Who makes good the balance? And Echo answers, improperly, "Manassa"! "Is Arabella Mr. Winkle's mistress?" the best of parodists made Mr. George Moore ask, adding, "If not, she will be." Is Barbara the paramour of the Smyrnese, spiritually bernoused, sheik? If not, we know that she will be. Now two things happen. First, Manassa offers Trent the secretaryship of one of his companies, and second, Monro comes back from Mexico, having got his first train safely across his bridge. Levantine teeth having been again exposed, and something said about the limited patience even of the Near East, we feel that things are working up to an agreeable rumpus. Six weeks later the kettle of fish, more or less pretty, is fully exposed. Monro has told Barbara that everybody is "talking," in answer to which Barbara has shrugged her pretty shoulders, saying, presumably, that if everybody is talking, obviously nobody can have time to listen, so what's the odds? In the meantime Manassa, with more than wolfish finesse, has consistently given Trent the wrong tips. Whereby that man of straw, being hopelessly involved, has forged Manassa's name to a bill, and must throw himself upon his wife's generosity, using Claudio's arguments and inviting Isabella-Barbara to placate this Angelo-Maldonado-Manassa. Barbara says she will do what she can. But Monro opposes the shameful solution, declaring, more or

less with Dumas's Olivier de Jalin, that "Il faut arriver du Mexique pour empêcher qu'on aie cette idée-là." In quick succession the wife and the honourable lover depart for the city, and as the curtain falls on the second act it is obvious that the financier is in for two exciting quarters of an hour.

Now it appears that Manassa has gone bear on Monro's railway, and that he stands to lose something like a quarter of a million. Debating upon this unpleasant pill he decides to sugar-coat it with Barbara's surrender, in return for which he promises to hand her Trent's forged bill. But before his fell design can be accomplished Monro arrives with an offer to compound Manassa's difficulties for two hundred thousand in return, of course, for the bill. There is some exchange of abuse, at the end of which Manassa reflects that a saving of fifty thousand is, after all, an economy, and that Barbara won't know a copy of a forged bill from the document itself. Once more the lips curl back and the wolfish teeth sardonically gleam. Now, naturally enough, Barbara and Monro have been too busy to tell Trent that he need not worry any more about his peccadillo, so not very naturally Trent shoots himself. But this he is bound to do in any case, since there is no other way whereby Monro can clasp Barbara to his heart and invite her to share his bamboo bungalow in Bongaloo, or whatever Mexico's capital may be called. Which he does after Manassa has snarled something about being quits and Barbara has knelt at his feet in the attitude laid down by the best play-producers as indicative of repentance.

It would be a mistake to consider *The Golden Calf* too seriously. Taken with a grain of salt and the good-will to believe that that which is said with witty intention achieves wit this play is an amusing entertainment. It is difficult to see how the piece could be better played. Mr. Samson and Mr. Hannen suggest adequately the yellow and the noble streaks, and it is certainly not Mr. Massey's fault that he reminds us a trifle too insistently of the gentleman at the party who promised to sing better after supper, and then found there wasn't any. Miss Margaret Bannerman's Barbara is easily her best performance since her

Lady George Grayston in *Our Betters*, and shows what a very brilliant actress she is in the one rôle which suits her. Mr. Algernon West contributes a piece of agreeable and amusing fooling, and Mr. Rupert Lister acts two small parts with distinction.

A PLAY FOR LADY JANE

"The Spook Sonata": a play. By August Strindberg. Globe Theatre, 14 June, 1927.

"There is a trancendentality of delirium," said Gilbert's Lady Jane, "which the earthy might mistake for indigestion." If one were forced to find a receipt for the trancendentalities of Strindberg's most difficult play, one might suggest Shakespeare's sixty-sixth sonnet, Hamlet's worm-and-Emperor mood, Lear's "luxury" speech, something of Poe, Baudelaire, and Wedekind. Set these to simmer and take off the scum, and *The Spook Sonata* is the residuum. To explain away this piece would probably be easier than to explain it; indeed, the upshot of communal elucidations in the foyer after the first and second acts seemed to be that Strindberg at one time inhabited a lunatic asylum, and that the play proved it. But that cock will not fight, since the author's sequestration was in the early 'nineties, and this play was not written until ten years after his return to health. Probably if there had been a third intermission we should all have agreed that enlightenment of one sort or another had come to us, each in his own way. For there is a point in the third act at which the fog lifts. That point occurs when something in the Student's brain pulls a trigger; and it is we as well as he who begin to see more clearly. Each, of course, must still pierce the mist for himself. For myself I can only say that the play took on the aspect of a line of orbit travelling through incidents related only after the manner of points on a circumference, and held together by the attraction of some central truth. If one could find the particular truth, all well and good. None, I think, could doubt the existence in Strindberg's mind of some centre to his circle, for without it the play must have been chaos, and chaos it undoubtedly was not. Behind the most utter-seeming nonsense there was mind, declaring itself in riddles and incomprehensible symbols, but still mind.

Seated in the theatre it is difficult to renounce the old notions of drama as something based upon normal logic

and human consistency, and all the more difficult when the renunciation called for is allowed to be intermittent. We grasp that the Old Man in the bath-chair is Malevolence, and that the cold, vice-like grip in which he holds the Student's hand is his eighty evil years. What we don't grasp so easily is that the play which ensues is not Drama but Masque. Incidents crowd upon us, alternating between the comprehensible and the incomprehensible. We register one success in the matter of the Old Man's courtship of the beggars whom he fobs off with the hint of a treat at his funeral—is not this savagery at the dishonest politician's expense? We notch another success in the matter of the Old Man's power over his manservant—this is understandable blackmail. No difficulty, either, about that figure of the dead man which in its cere-cloths stalks out of the house to glut vanity on the flag at half-mast. But here our lucky hits stop, and we enter precariously upon the no-man's-land of incomprehensibility. Why should the Nobleman who is also a Colonel prove to belong neither to the peerage nor to the army? Why should his wife voluntarily immure herself in a cupboard whence after twenty years she emerges with the voice of a parrot? What is the meaning of the statue; of the Old Man's Fiancée, now eighty years of age, who never speaks; of the screen which the butler places round the living as a sign that they are going to die? What, oh what are those hyacinths? For last poser to end this most weird of questionnaires, what are we to understand by the mad tea-party at which the Old Man and the Parrot-Wife, the Daughter, the Fiancée, and one other guest meet once a week for twenty years to nibble biscuits in silence? "Curiouser and curiouser!" we murmur, when suddenly the play again becomes comprehensible. The Old Man forces his way into the tea-party, ploughs up the visage of each guest, and is himself seized in the beak of the Parrot-wife, who tears the mask from his face and strips his evil soul. This done, she bids him take her place in the cupboard, and calls to the factotum to bring the screen.

The third act contains the love-making of the Student and the Daughter, and throughout this act the Colonel and his Parrot-wife sit silently in an alcove. After a

time the play takes a sudden dive into what might be conscious burlesque. There is a long diatribe against table-legs which need propping, ill-fitting windows, dirty lamp-glasses, clogged ink-bottles. This rises to full persecution-mania with the terrifying figure of the Cook, who, instead of nourishing the family, drains its life-blood, and flourishes, as dire presage and embodiment, a bottle of colouring-matter normally associated with soup and gravy. " Bring the screen ! " now cries the Daughter, from whose cheeks all colouring-matter has fled. And in the twinkling of an eye the nonsense fades and the spirit is bathed in pure poetry as, through the chinks of the screen, the Student breathes to the dying girl his message of deliverance.

If there is method in this madness—and one is convinced there is—it can only be in the existence of the central key of which one spoke earlier on. In the " trigger " speech the Student describes the Old Man's funeral. He has been moved to tears by the noble utterances of the clergyman and the dead man's best friend, only to learn next day that the lives of all covered abysses of infamy. Is not the key we are looking for here, and is not that key the falsity and lying hypocrisy of human relations ? Shroud and mummy-wrapping, parrot-cry, and cold marble—are not these so many symbols of untruth ? Tired with all these and what they stand for, Strindberg would be gone. But not before he has pursued them with a hate which turned to frenzy, and, at last, in his already shaken mind, to exaggerative paranoia. I do not suggest that this is the whole truth about this play ; I hope it may be a bit of it.

THE TABLE-TALK OF MR. PROHACK

"*Mr. Prohack*": *a comedy. By Arnold Bennett and Edward Knoblock. Court Theatre*, 16 *November*, 1927.

In some "preliminary literature"—horrid phrase!—the world has been informed that *Mr. Prohack* was written by Mr. Arnold Bennett and Mr. Edward Knoblock in collaboration "with far less ease than the other two plays." I do not know that this is, properly speaking, any concern of the playgoer. "Voyons, monsieur; le temps ne fait rien à l'affaire," said Alceste to the versifier who pleaded that he had taken a bare quarter of an hour over his sonnet. *Milestones*, we are informed, was written at Fontainebleau in three weeks and a half all told, though the weather was the hottest in Mr. Bennett's experience. *London Life* was written on Mr. Bennett's yacht. "Even at the top of Southampton Water, close to the Cunard and the White Star berths, the wind was hard enough to cover the deck with surf." So the collaborators, battening down the hatches, retired below. For three weeks the gale blew. But it was *London Life* which blew itself out first, and Mr. Knoblock returned to London after a spell of weather which must surely have been the windiest in Mr. Bennett's experience. Slightly altering the sense one would repeat: "Voyons, messieurs; le temps ne fait rien à l'affaire."

Of *Mr. Prohack*, we are told that "nearly all the play was written twice, and some of it three times; one or two scenes were written four times." In other words, the play would not, to use a colloquialism, "come right." The confessions of authors as to their difficulties are no new thing. Stevenson was always full of his obstacles, and described at some length his heroines' "trick of growing ugly." We are entitled to respect Mr. Bennett's confession in the matter of "coming right." At the same time we are also entitled to ask why he and his collaborator were in such a hurry to produce something which they must have known had *not* come right. Molière comes to mind again with his pertinent:—

Quel besoin si pressant avez-vous de rimer ?
Et qui diantre vous pousse à vous faire imprimer ?
Si l'on peut pardonner l'essor d'un mauvais livre,
Ce n'est qu'aux malheureux qui composent pour vivre.

One can hardly imagine that this can be our collaborators' excuse.

Yet all that is the matter with *Mr. Prohack* is the second act. The first was a superb bit of character-exposition. It may be objected—in fact, a protest was made to me after the first act—that the odd little man with the ill-fitting moustache and trousers could not by any possibility have been an official at the Treasury. My objector went on to inform me that Treasury clerks, first-class, are invariably Balliol or Magdalen. Certainly Mr. Prohack was neither of these. I do not propose to rebuke Mr. Bennett for drawing a permanent official from a temporary war-time model. After all, it might be argued that some Oxford dons are not born that which they become, and that Balliol may grow baggy at the knee and Magdalen ragged about the moustache.

What is important is that within five minutes of the rise of the curtain Mr. Prohack was alive, not in the heavy-handed way of the average light comedy, but alive with the full vigour of the great comic creations—Uncle Toby, Micawber, Soapey Sponge, Mr. Pooter, Eliza's husband. Nothing happened in this act, except that our glowing little oddity received his windfall of ten thousand a year. Yet the whole of it was rich in the true comedy of character, and the laughter in the theatre proclaimed the mind which had been intensely occupied. Though it was a frontal attack, we were battered into something better than guffaws. One emerged into the foyer asking what Mr. Prohack would do with his money. The second-act answer was one huge disappointment. "*Mr. Prohack* is a comedy about a man of character—a philosopher who is rather human. He sees vicissitudes." So ran the advertisement. But alas ! only the first part of it was made good. We expected something more startling than that our *nouveau riche* should be measured for new clothes and engage a confidential secretary, make cumbrous love to Lady Massulam, and put half his fortune into the hands of a

supposed shark. I do not know whether these things are in the novel, but it is to be imagined that they would be better there. That a man possessing ten thousand a year should do nothing with it, and, having nothing to be confidential about, should insist upon engaging a confidential secretary—these things lie better on the page than in an actor's mouth. Even a novel is actionless at its peril. Did not Miss Stewart in Dumas's story say of the death of Bragelonne : " Enfin il a fait quelquechose : c'est, ma foi ! bien heureux " ? But a middle act which has no action does more than court peril : it ensures it. Remember the situation at the end of the first act. What would Mr. Prohack do with his money ? Nothing was the answer of a novelist-philosopher, not of a dramatist.

It may be that my theory that a play should resemble Mrs. Todgers's idea of a wooden leg—something strange to have expounded—is wrong. But the audience on Wednesday evening certainly felt the need for strange exposition. The third act made all possible amends. Now that it had become apparent that nothing could come of the story, and that Mr. Prohack's idiosyncrasies were all, we leant back in our seats and watched Mr. Bennett's ecstatic explorations into a character in which he obviously delights. After all, the disappointment was one of kind, not of quality. No rider, let it be said once more, can come without the horse. It is certain that our collaborators could not have got the distance without Mr. Charles Laughton, who gave yet another superb performance. Any middling actor can be senile and grotesque ; Mr. Laughton achieved the double triumph of being middle-aged and odd. Invited to parody one of his authors, he presented a marvellously tempered portrait, which was truthful to look and twinkle, yet showed a good deal of the man behind these natural defences. He conveyed quite perfectly that sense of gusto in the common facts of life which accounts for the ruthless delineation of things too familiar to be perceived. He gave us the sparrow-like intensity and the unoffending cocksureness. And then the actor passed on to something which was not his subject, but the creation of that subject's brain. He gave us the genius lying *perdu* in rollicking, shapeless clay. He

abounded in the fun which comes from pushing logic too far. As a technical feat the performance was immense. Mr. Laughton acted with his whole body, and when you thought that facial expression and vocal intonation were exhausted eked out these means with legs analytical, elucidatory, rhapsodical. To see him lean back on a sofa and keep the wit going with fat calves and lean slippers as a juggler does a ball—this was acting. But I must be careful, or I shall fall into a panegyric.

THE CASE AGAINST EXPRESSIONISM

"*The Adding Machine*": *a play. By Elmer Rice. Court Theatre,* 9 *January,* 1928.

This play does not bear re-seeing, and on the principle that no book is worth reading once that is not worth reading twice one might doubt whether it will bear seeing at all. On the other hand, it may be suggested that once at least in his life a man should have a tooth pulled out, or take chloroform, or go greyhound racing, so that he can decide whether he likes these experiences or not. Let none therefore be deterred from going to see *The Adding Machine* at the Court Theatre. Indeed, one would advise anybody who takes a serious interest in the drama to visit this play once, since the particular medium in which it is written is here fully exposed both in its virtues and its faults. Analogies are odious and, what is worse, often lead to muddled thinking. The proof of the pudding is only in the eating if the eater is in good fettle. The proof of Expressionism is only in the expressionist example if that example happens to be a good one. The playgoer who at the Court sees an expressionist play for the first time, should be very careful not to attack the new medium because of the indefensible things which the playwright has chosen to say in that medium.

First let us remind ourselves what Expressionism is supposed to be. The authoritative expositions, written principally by Germans, if they boil down to anything at all boil down to this: Expressionism renounces the individual and the particular act in favour of universal significance. Expressionism deals with Idea, yet shuns Thesis. Expressionism invites us to regard the personages of drama not only objectively and through our own eyes, but subjectively and through their own emotional natures. Boiling this down still further, and taking our example from this particular play, Mr. Zero, an insignificant, mindless, unhappy clerk, becomes all the clerks in the world, to whom are then allotted the characteristics of mindlessness, insignificance and unhappiness. Similarly,

Mrs. Zero becomes every household drudge who has relieved a tardy husband of his weekly wage and bewailed her lot as her master has sat " cropping audibly his later meal." But it is another poet and not Wordsworth who comes to mind when the Zeros give that strangest of parties to which they invite Mr. and Mrs. One, Mr. and Mrs. Two, and so on, up to Mr. and Mrs. Six, with oblique references to Mr. and Mrs. Ten and Twelve. Counting them up on our fingers, we remember that it was Bunthorne who bemoaned that whilst yearning for the Indefinable he should be brought face to face with the Multiplication Table.

Expressionism, according to Mr. Ashley Dukes, views the outer world as " a mist through which the mind carries a lantern casting strange shadows." The shadows, strange to say, all seem cast in the shape of isosceles triangles with occasional dispensation in favour of the equilateral. At least, Mr. W. G. Fay's production would have us so believe. The dishes from which the Zeros eat are triangular. The wicker-cage which is the dock from which Mr. Zero, the murderer, makes his impassioned apology, is shaped exactly like the figure in Euclid's Fifth Proposition. The tomb-stones in Mr. Zero's graveyard, the contours of the Elysian Fields, the levers of the purgatorial tread-mill—all these are triangular. This strictly, and in the best sense, nonsensical scenery is that old thing —the substitution of the formal expression of the artist's emotion for the representation of the object which has aroused it. Now Mr. Kenneth Macgowan, the Big Noise of Expressionism in America, has declared that the player must remain. This is very kind of him. But he goes on to insist that all about the actor the expressionist scene-artist must " place taboos against the ideas and emotions which we are used to associating with the actor, signs and wonders to arouse us to an acceptance of something fresh which he has to give." As signs, wonders, and in particular, taboos, one has no hesitation in saying that the Court Theatre's bits of cardboard are quite first-class.

But must the " something fresh " which the actor has to give be necessarily better than the old ? Must the tone-poems of Stravinsky be *better* than the symphonies of

Mozart? Must the landscapes of Utrillo be *better* than those of Constable? Must the justiciary drama of Mr. Rice be *better* than that of Mr. Galsworthy? To ask these questions is the easiest way of making it obvious that they are questions which should not be asked and cannot be answered. All one can say is that a new way of thinking and feeling has come into the world, and that there are people who are more deeply moved by new experiments than old certainties, who find something in Mr. Rice's tentative suggestions of Mr. Zero's tragedy which they do not find in Mr. Galsworthy's more complete explanation of William Falder's. One would be careful not to lay down any law, since this is a matter in which each man must be a judge for himself. Judging from the strictly personal point of view, I can only say that though the expressionist method has a certain value at the first shock, for me that value entirely disappears with repetition. To my mind two things are enormously against this medium. First, its simplificatory method destroys the individuality in the dramatist, and second, it annihilates imagination by being definitely more matter-of-fact than the representationalism which it would supersede. One man may no longer speak for a class, and before you are allowed to believe that Mr. and Mrs. Zero speak for their kind you must, according to Expressionism, have twelve of their friends sitting "around" and echoing them in chorus. "Show me!" said the unimaginative man from Yorkshire, and "show me!" is the slogan of the expressionist drama, which is really thinking visualised for the benefit of people who cannot use their brains. There was a time when a character had but to say: "And is old Double dead?" and mortality came over the stage like a cloud. But in the expressionist drama we must be shown twelve old Doubles dead, and, to judge by Mr. Rice's second act, prancing about in their grave-clothes. As to the quality of Mr. Rice's thought, there can be no two opinions. It is demonstrably woolly. It is simply untrue that clerks in a store are all exactly alike. No one would be so foolish as to advance the opinion that there is no difference between dukes; and to pretend that a thing must be true of wage-earners which it is monstrous to suggest of

wage-payers is, at the best, intellectual snobbery, and, at the worst, the other kind of snobbery. I know nothing about the working-man of America, but if Mr. Rice thinks the English working-man is uniformly miserable I invite him to spend a morning in any of our workshops, an afternoon on any of our football grounds, and an evening at any of our music-halls. One of the most depressing things about humanitarians is their mania for inventing woes for people who do not feel them. The myth about "the down-trodden, soulless millions" was invented by somebody who had never met a mechanic outside an Institute. What really happens is that some hyper-sensitive, over-educated pedant, travelling from London to Glasgow to lecture to the Mutual Improvement Society of Amalgamated Glaswegians, reflects that to clean railway-carriage windows and open railway-carriage doors, to examine tickets, bustle about with tea-baskets, and even wave a guard's flag or be the despot on the engine, would destroy his own hypersensitive, over-educated soul. Hence he argues that porter, cleaner, ticket-collector, refreshment-car attendant, guard, and engine-driver must equally be bored. There was never a greater fallacy, and one insists at length upon the point because it is a fallacy peculiarly dear to the expressionist playwright. The complement to this fallacy is that because fifty porters line up on Euston platform to open the doors of one soulless train, the train turns each porter into the same soulless image. "Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh, Class Legislation!—*is this right?*" The voice is the voice of old Eccles, but the mind behind it is the present mind of expressionist playwrights like Mr. Rice and makers of expressionist films such as *Metropolis*. The truth, of course, is that the railway porter commands as much individuality, happiness, and self-respect as any passenger whose luggage he carries. Necessarily there are exceptions: dumb poets born with the supreme misfortune—and the conceit—of wanting to write like Homer and no better capacity than to trundle with Hodge. But the number of Chattertons chained to a ledger is infinitely small, and Mr. Rice's error is to pretend that all clerks are as much deserving of commiseration as such Chattertons would be. For all practical purposes,

Mrs. Zero is as non-existent as Mrs. Harris. Expressionist playwrights should remember that the fundamental instinct in humanity is to have somebody to look down upon. The unlucky who cannot do this are very, very few ; and to them the Devil has his immemorial right.

I have no space in which to deal with the play's lesser blemishes—its schoolboy bizarrerie, its undergraduate metaphysics, the illogicality which charges with brute submissiveness the man who rebelled even unto murder. These things are comparatively unimportant. What is important is that writers of Mr. Rice's calibre do not realise that the greatest blessing ever conferred upon Man was the promise that in the sweat of his brow he should eat bread. The performance was not, to my way of thinking, a patch upon that given by the Stage Society a year or two ago. But how is it that no producer of this play has yet seen that to have a representational Mr. Zero pleading his cause in an expressionist cage before an expressionist jury is to take the horror out of both worlds ? Isosceles triangles demand to be lived in not by human beings but by Robots, and I therefore declare the entire performance at the Court Theatre, in so far as it was human, to have been wrong. Apart from the mechanised chorus the only attempt to play on the right lines was made by Miss Carrie Baillie. This actress found for the unbearable Mrs. Zero a mask, an accent, and a disposition which were as little human in any representational way as the triangular platters of her dining-table were normal. The evening's one other attempt at correspondency was the music of the entr'actes, which proceeded from some mechanical combination of gramophone and loud-speaker, and proved so hideous that the sensitive clapped hands to ears and fled incontinently into Sloane Square.

MRS. CAMPBELL SPARES HERSELF

"*Ghosts*": *revival of Ibsen's play. Wyndham's Theatre, 27 March*, 1928.

Mrs. Patrick Campbell's Mrs. Alving came, saw, and conquered everybody except those who realised how much there is in the part which was not being played, and who remembered how truly great Mrs. Campbell has it in her power to be when she wills. The performance gave us only the shell of Ibsen's character; as a projection of the artist's personal genius it never rose, until the third act, above the perfunctory. I regret to have to say this, but many kinds of truth demand it. There is the truth to critical integrity; there is the truth to the art of great acting as that art was conceived at the close of the nineteenth century; and there is one's obligation to the many young people who came to catch a glimpse of the last of our magnoperative actresses. Mrs. Campbell has always been, and must always be, a great actress. She was a great actress when, as Paula Tanqueray, she stepped on to the stage of the St. James's Theatre on that famous Saturday in May thirty-five years ago. She was a great actress through all those years when she played at battledore with Duse, and held her own in the bandying across European frontiers of the great parts of the time. She was a great actress when in *Pelléas and Mélisande* she played with Bernhardt and was not eclipsed.

There are two ways of being a great actress. One is to attain to such a virtuosity of *interpretation*, to become so completely identified with Jane Clegg and Saint Joan, Hecuba and Lady Macbeth, Phèdre, Marguerite Gautier and Hedda Gabler that you behold only the character and forget the player. But this is a counsel of perfection, and the actress who can do it has never existed. (Actors sometimes achieve it, but they are character-actors like Coquelin.) Bernhardt was always Bernhardt—said the Dusolaters, conveniently forgetting that Duse was always Duse. What one really means is that each great part finds in the great actress a corresponding greatness of

mind and spirit to jump with it, so that Phèdre, when Bernhardt is playing it, becomes Bernhardt's Phèdre, and Magda becomes Duse's Magda. The other way of being a great actress is to substitute the player's genius for the playwright's talent; in other words, to pull an author through by playing him off the stage. This was Macready's way with Sheridan Knowles, Rachel's with Mme. de Girardin, Irving's with Wills, and Sarah's with Sardou. It was Mrs. Campbell's way with parts like Agnes Ebbsmith which meant nothing at all, but were made to express yearning infinities. It is, truth to tell, the easiest of the royal roads to fame. A great interpreter like Janet Achurch may act herself into her grave and remain unknown to all but a handful of the public; the actress who can make a splash in Sardou or other rubbish is sure of:

réclame and recall,
Paris and St. Petersburg, Vienna and St. James's Hall.

None of the qualities which we have so greatly admired in Mrs. Campbell is essential to the perfect portrayal of Mrs. Alving. Or put it the other way about and say that an actress may lack every grace of diction, gesture, and habit and play the part perfectly. What Mrs. Alving is now doing in the way of gesture, with what grace or clumsiness she takes her drawing-room floor, is not the point; in so far as present beauty is distracting it were better that she should not remind us of the conventional laws of grace. The point of concentration is not the freedom of Mrs. Alving's hands and arms, but the self-imposed cramping of her mind during those twenty dreadful years with Alving. What, it may be urged, is there to prevent Mrs. Alving from being a beautiful woman, and behaving as such? Quite. But if Ibsen's play is to be fully acted, the spectator's mind must first establish contact with the mind of Mrs. Alving: the rest is embroidery.

Throughout the first two acts Mrs. Campbell's movements and gestures and vocal intonations were charged with a significance of which the modern theatre has lost the secret. But the significance would still have been there if Mrs. Campbell had merely crossed the stage and recited the alphabet. With her, as with all great actresses, physical qualities have a grandiloquence of their own, apart from the

meaning which they are to convey ; she has but to show herself and she is recognisably a part of splendour, like the Lord Mayor's coach. But during the first two acts the coach seemed empty, or at least one did not feel that Mrs. Alving was in it. When Janet Achurch, who had no superficial graces, or kept them strictly under—when Janet listened to the chunnerings of Pastor Manders you were in no way concerned with this gesture or that pose. Nor did you read in her face Mrs. Campbell's polite boredom. You read there first a recapitulation of old agonies, and next the slow strengthening of the resolve to tear down the veil. Mrs. Campbell's expression throughout this long scene meant no more than a sublimated : " So that's all you know about it, my dear Pastor ! " And when Mrs. Alving said : " Now at last I can speak ! " the " at last " was meaningless, because one had not been made conscious of any precedent struggle. The whole of the first act moves to Regina's overheard : " Let me go, Mr. Oswald ! " At this the bottom should fall out of Mrs. Alving's world, and you should read on her face the twofold recognition—first, that Oswald is Alving's son, and second, that the frustrations of her life have been unavailing. Duse conveyed this miraculously, even to those who had no Italian. Mrs. Campbell's face here was blank, and Mrs. Alving was not more pained than if the bottom had fallen out of one of Regina's coffee-pots. The actress, by allowing us throughout these two acts to marvel at the beauty and physical grace which so illuminated the old plays of revolt, had used, as it were, Magda's rebellious language to give us Mrs. Alving's self-subjugation. It was magnificent, but it was not this particular play of Ibsen. When the curtain went up for the third act we saw a different Mrs. Campbell. Now at last the great play had got hold of her ; and the artist who sometimes sleeps in Mrs. Campbell woke up and realised that perfunctoriness would not do. From this point to the end her playing was perfect. This great actress must forgive me if I measure this performance by her own greatness, and by that which one has set up to the young generation as a standard of greatness. One realises the difficulties of a single performance. But standards are absolute things, which are not subject to

allowances. The standard pound is an absolute pound, and not something which would have been a pound if somebody had not dropped it and chipped a bit off. Mrs. Campbell's performance fell below her own standard because one felt that in the first two acts her mind and soul were not in it. It was the third act alone which enabled one to say confidently : " There, young people, is the great acting we are always telling you about."

MRS. CAMPBELL SPARES US NOT

"*John Gabriel Borkman*": *revival of Ibsen's play.* "*Q*" *Theatre,* 16 *October,* 1928.

The first thing to be noted about this revival is that the quite large theatre at Kew Bridge was packed to its doors at every performance. The second is that the inhabitants of Kew and the few adventurous spirits who braved the journey from London were vouchsafed the certainty that Mrs. Patrick Campbell, when she likes, is still the best tragic or emotional actress in the country. In the sheer acting sense, by which one means the marriage of spirit and the technical means to convey spirit, Mrs. Campbell has no rival on our stage. Her silences are more significant than the volubilities of the lesser executants, though it is only when she begins to speak that her supremacy comes into being. This great artist has many moods, among them moods of contrariety. She will walk through a performance; indeed, she recently sat through *Ghosts*. Her first act on Tuesday night was almost perfunctory, and if I am to assign a reason for it I should say that it was because her art has not anything in common with the method of Miss Nancy Price. This player has adopted for good or ill a scheme of presentation at once bold and hard. Her characters are daguerreotypes and her utterances are staccato utterances. There is no "give" in her playing or in her voice; her resolution stands in no need of other fuel. This acting is self-contained. It is not fired by any other acting nor does it light a flame at which any other player may kindle. Mrs. Campbell's temperament is quite other; it is that of a player who seeks and demands to find in a similar temperament a soil in which her own art may expand. She found it in Mr. Victor Lewisohn, who is that unmistakable thing, an actor. With Mr. Lewisohn, as with Mrs. Campbell, the expression of an emotion appears to be born at the same time as the emotion itself; the player exposes both together and it seems that they can never have been separated. Mr. Lewisohn can hold an emotion as a

pianist sustains a note—one of Mrs. Campbell's supremest gifts—and it was this common faculty which enabled them to merge the great scenes of the second and fourth acts into perfect wholes. To witness these two scenes was to be in at the rebirth of an old experience. Once more Mrs. Campbell performed the miracle of her earliest years, the miracle of closing the eyes to the flesh, even to the old questing sweep of throat and neck importuning too much of life, and opening them to the grace and melody of mind. Mr. Lewisohn, catching fire from his great partner, stood, as it were, beside the body of the embezzling bank manager and showed us the mental ardour of this seedy Napoleon.

SOME REAL ACTING

"The Cherry Orchard": a play. By Anton Tchehov. Garrick Theatre, 11 April, 1928.

What is the matter with intellectual London? Or is there no intellectual London to have anything the matter with it? I ask these questions because of the rows of empty stalls on Wednesday afternoon when the Moscow Art Theatre Company gave their first performance of *The Cherry Orchard*. One does not ask where the fashionables were who on the previous evening flocked to a play about a Pekinese dog. But where were the Dusolaters? The language was no excuse, for Duse's reputation in this country was made by and among people who would have been hard put to it to order a meal in Soho's native tongue.

It is surely time somebody nailed to the counter that hypocritical and snobbish piece of cant about acting being so good as to make unnecessary any understanding of what it may be about. Take the first scene in *The Brothers Karamazoff*, the play with which the Russian company opened. Somebody, who in the programme was called Theodor Karamazoff and in the synopsis was dubbed, doubtless correctly, Fjodor Pavlovitch, sat at a table and harangued his two sons. The harangue cannot have been many minutes short of half-an-hour, and for those ignorant of Russian I say firmly that it was impossible to have the faintest idea what it was about, though to anybody with eyes to gather gesture, ears to take in intonations, and the mind to conceive temperament it was obvious that M. Pavloff was a great actor treating those who understood what he was talking about to a display of great acting. The question has been asked: Why cannot one regard these Russian actors as cinema actors and be completely satisfied with their pantomime? The cases are not on all fours. The pantomime of cinema stars is nothing and expresses nothing. The words they are seen to mumble are without meaning, and we know that any others would do. Grimaces and mouthings are strictly supererogatory, since they merely tell us what we shall presently see, and

it is from the seeing that satisfaction comes. When tear-stained faces find consolation in a close-up we appreciate that their grief is for a death, a bankruptcy, or a misunderstanding, because we have already seen somebody die or go bankrupt or be misunderstood. That we do not know whether the unheard chatter is of earthquakes or tidal waves does not bother us; we shall see presently. The interpreters of Tchehov and Dostoievski are in different case—with them words are happenings. No actress sitting on a sofa, were she three times Duse, can tell us by unaided eyes, tone of voice, and play of hands whether Madame Ranevsky is weeping the death of her little boy, bemoaning that unfortunate affair in Paris, or bewailing the loss of the orchard.

I have cited this example for the simple reason that Tchehov's play is the easiest to get up in our visitors' programme. The piece has often been played in English, in London, and in recent memory. It is published. It is a masterpiece. It is a familiar masterpiece. The intellectuals know it by heart, or say they do. Yet not their big battalions and hardly half a dozen spies were present at a performance which everybody must have known would be, to say the least of it, remarkable. Were our supposed enthusiasts put off by the fact that the players had not come hot-foot from Moscow, and that the style and title of the Moscow Art Theatre were being used by a group of actors "now far removed from the original influence of Stanislavsky"? I cannot think so. The earth is now far removed from the original influence of the sun from which it split. But it is a good earth for all that. These Russian actors have wandered far from Moscow, but they still go round Stanislavsky; and the point with which we are concerned is not whether they were big or little fry in Moscow ten years ago, but how great they are as artists here among us to-day. They are, let us say roundly, great actors, or some of them are; and indeed it is to be presumed that ten years of the common study and performance of masterpieces and nothing but masterpieces must make for greatness. There may be better interpretations of Madame Ranevsky than that given by Mme. Germanova, who possibly failed to move us in the last act.

I am inclined to attribute this directly to the thinness of the audience, since the actress seemed to lose heart. But many of her earlier passages were exquisite, and one had only to contrast with this listless lady the vivacious courtesan in Dostoievski's play to realise that here was an actress approaching the first order. She accomplished the difficult feat of persuading you that, throughout, Madame Ranevsky was living in the nostalgia of the past and the melancholy of the future, stopping to the present every avenue of sense. This in itself was fine acting, and perhaps we should not have looked for other virtuosity. Possibly Mme. Gretsch did not explore all that is warped and bizarre in the governess. Charlotta is a grotesque who should frighten us a little in our laughter, and perhaps Mme. Gretsch was not more than odd. Yet how gracious she was as Katarina Ivanovna in the other play! Decidedly a fine actress. But there criticism, or, more correctly, hypercriticism, should end. The pathos of frustration and repression could not be better conveyed than by Mme. Krijanovskaia, nor could old age be depicted with greater fidelity and warmth than M. Pavloff uses. The characters of Gayef and Trophimoff can never be very understandable to the English mind, and may even seem a little dull; I shall not presume to criticise their interpreters. But Lopakhin is understood the world over, and I make bold to say that M. Espe was superb. M. Aslanoff as Ephikhodof gave us an unforced and in no way prettified buffoon. As Yasha and Dunyasha, M. Vasilieff and an actress whose name was not given on the programme showed how much of subtlety and implication may be given to the smallest parts without any sense of encroachment by the actors; and one would offer the Anya of Mme. Kedrova as an object lesson to every *ingénue* in the country. One cannot help dealing with these performances as though they were separate from one another like tricks in a game of cards. But these Russians do [not] separate their feats of acting; they play into one another's hands so that you can hardly tell where one artist ends and another begins. The characters live when they are on the stage, and go on living after they have left it. Madame Ranevsky's house is a home, or has been

one ; and the characters make up a family whose relationships are known to us, though the actors are not given any words in which to make them known. Take for illustration the impressing of the elder daughter into participation in the conjuring trick. She has nothing to say, but Mme. Krijanovskaia shows, in some way which the closest observation cannot detect, that Varya is only doing it to oblige. The actress does not make any point of this ; we are just reminded of a hundred family gatherings. The play was acted before some wretched scenery, the wretchedness of which did not even begin to matter. The lighting was not particularly good, and this mattered more. Or am I sentimentalising ? M. Komisarjevsky certainly sentimentalised when he bathed that last scene in a glow of afternoon sunshine filtering through the shutters. The play then seemed a monument to dejection, whereas we know from the author's letters to Madame Stanislavsky that some time before the first production of the piece it had turned out " not a drama but a comedy, in parts a farce." Is it possible that our English productions of this play have had too great an infusion of tears ? The tears were shed in this performance by our visitors ; but nobody seemed to mind them, not even those who cried. Which is perhaps as near truth to Tchehov as we shall get.

AS THEY LIKE IT

"Excelsior": a play. By Paul Armont and Marcel Gerbidon. Adapted by H. M. Harwood. Playhouse Theatre, 5 September, 1928.

The " they " of my title refers to playwrights across the Channel, to whom the English accord all liberty. Let Frenchmen in their gall dub a jade a jade ; our withers are unwrung. At first sight, *L'Ecole des Cocottes*—the original title to which Hogarth supplies a better translation than anything filched from Longfellow—should be moral, since it teaches aspiring sempstresses that beneath jewels improperly acquired there must ever be heartache. A second look suggests first, that emeralds need not necessarily lead to ennui, and second, that the sempstresses may well deem the risk worth while. But why take too brainsickly a concern as to whether a play is moral or not, if one is of the school which believes that the theatre's first duty is to amuse? Our French friends have an extraordinary knack of combining amusement with truth. They have set down very entertainingly what all France knows—that the great ladies of the half-world arrive at eminence by moral declension if you like, which is acutely not their point, but also by arduous and painful climbing, which is. Their piece might be described as the climber's vade-mecum. To the little Montmartre sempstress appears a Professor of Etiquette. Making a long nose at virtue he instructs Ginette in her shameful progress, an exposition which possibly affronts the few concerned with the morals of French comedy but which certainly delights the many taking pleasure in its pattern. Ginette's progress from the humble Montmartre apartment through the turgid splendours of the Rue d'Anjou to the icy magnificences of the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, is well and wittily ordered. Doubtless it is a vulgar progress. But it does not follow that a play about a vulgar progress must be a vulgar play. Owing to the triumphant miscasting of two important characters, the piece is now much less well performed than when it was given on a Sunday evening three years ago at the Princes Theatre. Since the play

and the characters remain in their own country and are not transferred to this, it is essential that all the actors should make an attempt at simulating French people. Miss Gladys Cooper, Mr. Ernest Thesiger, Mr. Athole Stewart and Miss Naomi Jacob conform to this necessity at least sufficiently to let us quietly pretend that they are French. Mr. Nigel Bruce and Miss Hermione Baddeley insistently contravene the amicable arrangement. Mr. Bruce makes no attempt whatever to be a middle-aged French draper in love with the grisette over the way. Instead he is just a young, healthy, Clydeside riveter in his best clothes out on the spree. Or I will put it the other way about, and suggest that if Mr. Bruce claimed in this part to be a jovial riveter I should hail the portrait as capital. But it is a capital portrait in the wrong place. To Miss Baddeley was entrusted the part, formerly so brilliantly played by Miss Dorothy Hamilton, of Ginette's humble little friend, the girl whom Nature has obviously ordained for the paths of virtue, the girl who, with every desire to be admired, can find no admirers. Miss Baddeley gave us none of the irony of this, and in its place offered us some Cockney humours. These were excellent in their way, but again the way was the wrong way. These two characters being transformed out of recognition, the play was reduced to a framework for a solo performance by Miss Cooper.

Is her *gamine* of the first act quite as successful as formerly? Is Ginette in her first incarnation the least little bit overgrown, and not unlike the Alices in Wonderland perpetrated by mature actresses for Christmas delight? One thinks the second act better. Ginette is now at her second stage, and it is a hideous stage, horribly housed, gowned, and mannered. Like the heroine of Abel Hermant's *La Fausse Comédienne*, whose mother was never tired of declaring: " Ma fille est peuple ! " Ginette, despite her splendours, still remains *peuple*. Clever though Miss Cooper's acting was hereabouts, it did not go beyond that competence which ceaseless industry has won for this actress. In the last act we saw another player, the artist in whom there is something, a spark of something more than perseverance. If the art of the theatre is visual as

well as intellectual, then this is the best act of the three. The cold stone columns, the purple arras against which candles burn as for a *messe noire*, the vermillion throne shaped like a choir-stall, all this provided an admirable setting for that black-velveted, pearl-fettered figure which a modern Reynolds might take as model for The Sordid Muse. It is in these surroundings that Ginette, now become a pillar of disillusion, sets up her everlasting rest and adds the yoke of ministerial stars to that world-wearied flesh. She is to become the mistress of a Cabinet Minister. Miss Cooper acted the scene superbly. No half-hearted approach to Beauty would have sufficed ; it was essential that Beauty should be present in person. It was present. Then how tactful her playing was ! The authors, as becomes countrymen of Dumas *fils*, have not forgotten Marguerite and all that used to be postulated by : " Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relèvera jamais ! " But the theme which made a whole play in 1852 has now shrunk to a pious sentiment. " I have lost the right to love," sighs Miss Cooper, allotting the phrase its dewy modicum. Shall she, to ease her charged bosom, dine once more at Montmartre ? She shall, and for this purpose reassumes her simple first-act frock. But the Professor intervenes, pronouncing that as the artist belongs not to himself but to his art, so the great *cocotte* belongs not to herself but to Paris. This may be good philosophy. At least it persuades Ginette to change her dress again, which is certainly the better theatre. She departs processionally, one long enviable shimmer ; and is engulfed by those sad curtains in whose purple nigritude let us hope the moralists will find something didactic. The play is an entertaining sermon on the sad fate of one who lost her soul and in the process came by the entire contents of the Rue de la Paix.

A DAY WITH THE AUDRY AND WAVENEY

"Fame": a play. By Audry and Waveney Carten. St. James's Theatre, 20 February, 1929.

"Life," said the Victorian wit, "is a *mauvais quart d'heure* made up of exquisite moments." One was reminded of this on hearing a lady say as she left the theatre: "Of course, it's a bad play, but I enjoyed every moment of it!" There were at least fifteen good moments, but the trouble was that they did not add up to the same quarter of an hour. The piece seemed to be written in three separate manners, each act coming to an end like a train against which the word STOP appears in the guide, and then starting somewhere else as another train starts in another column. The characters did and said the most improbable things, but contrived to be entertaining despite, or perhaps in virtue of, their improbability, in the way that Plinlimmon, rising inconsequentially from its plain, is more amusing than it would be skipping in company with a lot of other hills. Wildean wit, railroad eccentricity, cadastral catastrophe—the reader may well ask what jumble he has here? The answer is such a jumble as this play presented.

When the curtain went up we saw what was left of the Audry and Waveney Hunt taking tea at Sir Thomas Hanson's country-seat in Leicestershire. At least the meal was called tea, though the only outward and visible signs of that stimulant were boiled eggs and cherry brandy, whisky and cigars. Doubtless all these were perfectly correct. Never having been in the pink other than physiologically I do not presume to criticise. Indeed, I feel in my bones that the meal was perfectly right. Certainly more right than the friends of Lord Edward Hulton, who persisted in calling him Lord Hulton, and much more right than the young woman who proposed to play golf with an outfit consisting of one driver, three spoons and a putter. Ever so much more right, in any case, than Lady Myrtle Frampton who, on hearing that Paolo Gheradi's parents were not married, twitted him with

being a bastard. The unmentionable word may be current coin in Mayfair's drawing rooms, though I doubt it. But its use in anybody's seat in Leicestershire is, I think, extremely unlikely. Unlikeliest of all is that Lady Myrtle should apply it to the fiancé of her host's daughter. Who, then, was Lady Myrtle, and what was she that at five in the afternoon she should be uncommon tipsy and unco free of a word forbidden in the barrack-room? The point is that there was never any such person, the character being a figment of our authors' imagination, a cog to help the plot along and also serve as a peg for some good fun. For Lady Myrtle, on hearing that Gheradi was a fiddler, became sufficiently unfuddled to say succinctly: "Let's get clear about this. Queen's or Wigmore?"

The reader must know that Sonia, the daughter of the fox-hunting Sir Thomas, had literally run into Paolo Gheradi in Hammersmith, and, having impaled him on the bonnet of her Austin, had then thrown her own over whatever windmills there may be in that draughty neighbourhood. Paolo, disimpaled, told Sonia that he played in a cinema. Whereupon Sonia said that he was her knight for ever and rushed him up to the Mad Hunters' tea-party. After the staggered guests had departed, Sir Thomas gave tongue in the manner of irascible progenitors in the days of the three volume novel. Though he did not in so many words challenge the pair to that immemorial act known as the darkening of doors, he did actually threaten to disinherit Sonia if she went off with her fiddler. But Sonia went. And Nemesis, a little nippier than usual and in a witty mood of homœopathy, invited the choleric old gentleman to go at once to his stables since the temperature of his favourite mare had also risen. On the first night, and probably owing to the cares of production, Sir Gerald du Maurier rather underplayed the fiddler in this act. Mr. Scott-Gatty, however, leaping gallantly into the breach, saved the situation by some storming and raving at which the St. James's stalls raised their elegant eyebrows. But the noise and energy were what was needed, and, after all, it is no mean feat for an actor at the St. James's Theatre to lift the roof off that of the old Surrey.

When the curtain went up on the second act we learned that lots of things had happened in the elapsed two years. Sonia had married her fiddler, her father had died, Gheradi had out-Kreislered Kreisler, and Lady Myrtle had become sober. But I am not sure that in her sober senses Lady Myrtle was not an even unpleasanter creature. First, she accepted Lord Edward's proposal of marriage in one of the best-written and most delicious comedy scenes anybody can have witnessed for a very long time. But having done that she proceeded to vamp the fiddler to the extent of bestowing the key of the drawing-room door in her bosom and threatening to lower her shoulder-straps and raise the house with cries of rape. This sudden transition from excellent Maugham to threadbare Theda Baraism is a good example of this play's unevenness. Being vamped so unnerved Gheradi that even the Meditation from "Thaïs" did not avail to calm him down. Something snapped, and he fell back upon the sofa paralysed in both arms—though why Nemesis should have been annoyed with Gheradi nobody knows. Perhaps she was in a Greek mood that evening, and took to interfering with Gheradi's existence as lightly as Aphrodite did when she put her finger in Hippolytus' pie. Anyhow the stroke brought Gheradi and his loving Sonia to those miserable seaside lodgings where their love dwindled together with Gheradi's savings, for the old man had kept his word and left Sonia without a penny. But the local doctor fell in love with Sonia, and, being a man of honour, proposed to throw up his hard-bought practice at Seafield and chase in Africa the antique elephant. But before becoming a panel doctor in Lagos this knight of the scalpel returned to his damosel her husband's cheque, who, finding it lying about the house, proceeded to call her the most awful names. Whereupon Sonia squared up to Gheradi and bestowed her fists upon his countenance "as it rained kisses." At this Gheradi, forgetting his paralysis, covered-up and was cured! After which he packed off Sonia to the doctor, who needn't leave Seafield, and telephoned his accompanist to get busy. And we gleaned that whereas Lagos had lost a physician, musical London had regained a virtuoso.

This last act was easily the best of the three, though the fox which was finally killed in the Seafield lodgings did not seem to be the one we had started in the Leicestershire drawing-room. Sir Gerald at last had something human to act, and he acted as one would have expected, with more power and purpose than in some recent plays. His change from graceful suavity to peevish ill-manners has had the effect of a sea-breeze on a jaded invalid. Excellent support was rendered by Miss Nora Swinburne as Sonia, and by Miss Cathleen Nesbitt and Mr. Nigel Bruce as the extraordinary lovers. Mr. Frank Vosper threw the medico's practice to the winds with a debonairness which fitted him as well as his smart overcoat, and there was a good piece of comic acting by Miss Naomi Jacob. In conclusion, may I re-affirm that this may not be a good play, technically considered, but that I enjoyed every word of it. And so, I think, did everybody else.

A MASTERPIECE

"Berkeley Square": Revival of the play by John L. Balderston and J. C. Squire. Lyric Theatre, 6 March, 1929.

It is possible that a few general observations may clarify the metaphysics of this play. Let me therefore begin by saying that if I were asked to guess what was the first aphorism ever uttered I should suggest something like: "To-day is only yesterday all over again." Probably the first cave-man thought this, and certainly Sir Arthur Pinero was expressing much the same thing when he made Paula Tanqueray say: "The future is only the past entered through another gate." Whereupon Aubrey had his sententious: "That's an awful belief!" But to-day the march of science is so orientated that most of the things in which we must acquire belief fill us with awe. To expostulate why day is day, night night, and time is time is to waste all three, said old Polonius some years ago. But Einstein, expostulating further, told us yesterday that the matter isn't so simple, and that Time is really a function of Space. And vice-versa. And so the game goes on as it has always gone on. The Scientists, backed by evidence, tell us what non-scientists backed by their imaginations have always known. Thus we find Maurice Maeterlinck hinting at Einstein thirty years ago. In *Le Temple Enseveli* he already regards Time and Space as "le double mystère infini dans lequel flotte toute notre vie." Or we might put it that that which in Einstein is one star had already in Maeterlinck's mind got as far as the twofold, inseparable existence of twin stars. Thirty years is a short space of time for the merger of the binary into the single system to be complete. But Maeterlinck got even nearer to Einstein when he said that we ought not to accept facts in the Time-dimension which we should refuse to accept in the Space-dimension. The traveller through Space will not hold that a town does not exist until he enters it. Yet we who travel through Time pretend to believe that an event does not happen until we arrive at the point in Time where we can testify to it.

Compare now Peter Standish's speech in *Berkeley Square* in which he gives us the old figure of the man sailing down a winding stream. The clover-field is in his present, the trees he has left behind are in his past, and what lies round the corner is in his future. But to the man in an aeroplane all three are the present. Whence, Peter argues, all Time must really be one. What is this but Maeterlinck's : " En soi, il est à peu près certain qu'il n'est qu'un immense Présent, éternel, immobile, où tout ce qui a eu et tout ce qui aura lieu a immuablement lieu, sans que demain, excepté dans l'esprit éphémère des hommes, se distingue d'hier, ou d'aujourd'hui " ? In fact, Maeterlinck is quite surprised at Nature's carelessness in having failed to provide Man with a bunch of cells to do for the future what his memory-cells do for the past, and he goes on to suggest that the more successful among seers, sibyls, and pythonesses have been less good historians, good logicians, and good guessers than extraordinary individuals possessed of the beginnings of some such physical apparatus.

The foregoing, I venture to say, bears directly upon this play. *Berkeley Square* deals, as all playgoers will remember from its previous production two and a half years ago, with what happens when Peter Standish, the American of 1928, arranges that his mind shall inhabit the body and for a space live the life of his ancestral cousin, the Peter Standish of 1784. Playgoers will realise the extraordinary poignancy of Peter's necessarily fruitless love for Helen Pettigrew, and hers for him. The new Peter cannot alter by one jot or tittle that which happened to the old Peter, and so Helen must die for love of the man who is not to be born for another hundred years. The exquisite tenderness of Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson is so heart-breaking that one almost resents the action of our playwrights in going so unnecessarily out of their way to wring our hearts. One asks if there is not enough romantic unhappiness on earth without postulating lovers separated by the centuries. Why stop at the Time-barrier ? Why not a Space-barrier also ? Montague sighing for Capulet across Verona's way is already bad enough. Must our hearts be wrung by Romeo sighing for Juliet across the Milky Way ? But suppose that Mr. Wells in his early

stories and M. Maeterlinck and now Einstein are not just blethering? Suppose there is something in this metaphysical aspect of time? Suppose Mr. Balderston is not talking balderdash when he makes his hero say to Helen: "The veil is thin for you"? The play ends with the reading of Helen's epitaph. But what if we reinforce the words "confident hope" with this new significance? Does it not deepen the play to suggest that the metaphysicians may for once be talking sense? And does not that suggestion absolve our playwrights from the charge of lacerating us out of pure wantonness? The beauty of this play is that it is not purely a vehicle for metaphysical discussion, but a whole and complete work of art in which metaphysics have their place. Playgoers who prefer to regard the piece as a human story only will find a brilliant comedy with a core of heartrending pathos. No other living English actress could do for Helen what Miss Forbes-Robertson does, and Mr. Leslie Howard manages the great difficulties of Peter with rare tact, even if his whole performance is in the last few minutes. But these are as remarkable as anything I can remember. May I suggest that Miss Valerie Taylor should stop mumbling and model her diction on that of Miss Marie Löhr, looking as superb and enunciating as magnificently as ever? Some brilliant additions and some no less brilliant deletions have been made, and the whole piece is now extraordinarily well worth seeing.

OUR NATIONAL THEATRE

"The New Moon": a musical play. By Oscar Hammerstein 2nd, Frank Mandel and Laurence Schwab. Music by Sigmund Romberg. Drury Lane Theatre, 4 April, 1929.

Round about a quarter of a century ago Mr. Max Beerbolm coined the verb "to bouch," ascribing derivation to an actor of the period. Let me, like Max, modestly rise, clear my throat, and propose the verb "to balfe," acknowledging that it harks back to the Irish composer and fourth member of the well-known group of statues in the foyer of Drury Lane. The other three figures, as everybody knows, are those of Shakespeare, Garrick and Kean. To balfe, then, means to confound values, generally in the theatrical sense, to elevate something to a position which it is not entitled to hold. Filling what was once our national theatre with a glorified musical comedy is a first-class example of balfing. To pay that respect to a semi-serious, semi-comic, and demisemi-musical entertainment which the civilised German pays to an opera by Strauss or a production by Reinhardt, to raise the show to the rank of a social event, to dress and dine elaborately for it, to discuss it, and, in fine, do anything but dismiss it as a high-spirited lark, is also balfing. The word, you see, is needed so badly, for it sums up so perfectly the national attitude towards the theatre. If we really needed a National Theatre for the housing and presentation of the world's greatest dramatic literature Drury Lane is, as it always has been, the very ticket. Bnt no sane person will contend that we want a National Theatre in the way in which the Germans and the French not only want but insist upon having one, and we want and insist upon having a stadium for our English Cup Final. The matter has been tried with the result that we know. We are proud of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Webster, Congreve, Sheridan, Goldsmith, and the rest, but our pride does not go the length of practice. We will not go to see our great works played. What we will go to see played,

and go in our hundreds of thousands, is drama of the *Rose Marie*, *Desert Song*, *Show Boat*, *New Moon* order, the kind of thing which the French put on at the Châtelet readily enough but which will not see production at the Français until all moons, new and old, are made of green cheese. Balfing, I submit, is more than an English national habit: it is an English characteristic. I look forward, then, to the time when in every dictionary there shall be, between the explanations of "Balefulness" and "Balisaur," "Balfe, *v.i.* To talk of anything with respect beyond its category. (*Deriv.:* Balfe, a statue of unhappy contiguity.) Balfer, *s.* One who balfes."

Is this attitude "superior"? If it is I can't help it. Try as I will, I cannot see that these Druriological orgies have anything more to do with the drama than the circus has. Now criticism of the circus can obviously have only one end, which is to propound and answer the question: Is it a good circus? Following this method, one can only ask whether *The New Moon* is as good Druriology as *The Silver Sickle* or *The Gibbous Girl*, and other precedent lunar phenomena. Perhaps before estimating how good a thing is, one should decide in one's mind how good such a thing may be. What are the essential elements of Druriology? An intelligent plot? On the whole, one thinks not. Have we not seen a Captain in the regular army filling in the time between parades by leading the Arab tribes against which his regiment is at war? An audience which could stomach and even approve that would stomach and approve anything. There can be no pre-emptive absurdity, then, in a manacled French count singing love-songs on the deck of a man-of-war to the blessed stars above and what Coleridge called the silly buckets below. Nor can there be absurdity in the admiring group which listens to him, consisting of the heroine in unspotted muslin, the head of the French detective service, and the vessel's captain who has been warned that an attack by pirates is imminent. After all June is June, the night and the Gulf of Mexico are still, and if pirates come they come. From the captain's point of view, the readiness is all. That captain's confidence in his crew and their readiness was justified. Immediately upon the conclusion of

Mr. Howett Worster's love ditty and Miss Evelyn Laye's suitable reply there glided past the backcloth a pirate bowsprit to which, armed to the teeth, clung desperadoes in an attitude which one confidently took to be that of a boarding party. In a trice, jiffy, or other atomy of time, twenty heads emerged from hatchways and twenty cutlasses met twenty grappling irons, or whatever it is that boarding-parties use. One found no absurdity in Mr. Worster's discovery that the pirate-captain was his boyhood's playmate, or in the way in which the two crews immediately fell to fraternising in a hornpipe of the period, wherein they were presently joined by a number of female pirates as prettily garbed as attendants at a picture palace. After which everybody decided to live a communal existence on an island in the Caribbean Sea, a decision which prompted Miss Laye to some stateswomanly utterances on Man's need of submission to government. But it was eleven o'clock, and the digression could not be pursued. Instead, we were landed on an island beach and admired the handsome way in which the lady-sailors transformed themselves into Mexican beauties and enlivened the local mango-swamp with white organdie and dancing pumps. At about eleven-twenty the French Revolution, with which I ought to say that the story is intimately connected, hove in sight, and the necessity for further vigil was at an end.

If then plot is not the thing, what is? The music? Mr. Sigmund Romberg's score is as hearteningly reminiscent as the fans of Druriology can reasonably demand. It was a pretty tune in *No No Nanette* of which " One Kiss " is a version in another rhythm. If another tristful ditty is only Tschaikowsky's Barcarolle all over again, it can be argued that the Russian is an excellent model. Did he not in an early theme in the Pathetic Symphony do for the opening phrase of Beethoven's Sonata Pathétique what Mr. Romberg did for the *No No Nanette* tune? There should be give and take in these matters, and the time-dimension being what it is, it must be the ancients who give and the moderns who take. The odd thing about it all appears to be that these echoes are doubtless unconscious; doubtless Mr. Romberg who conducted with great zest, did his filchings in the blissful illusion of

complete originality. But if, finally, spectacle be the essence of the business then let me say that *The New Moon* does very well. The mounting is superb, and if the dresses have not very much to do with one another they are costly enough to afford to be stand-offish. The playing? Perhaps that is the rub in this particular production. Mr. Worster acts agreeably and has a fine presence, but I doubt whether he would claim to be a singer. To supply the deficiency and do the necessary roof-lifting a *pukka* operatic tenor is brought in; and as Mr. Ben Williams is content to play no acting part worth mentioning, the pair put up an admirable Tweedledee-and-Dummish performance. Mr. Edmund Willard brings to the French sleuth a well-proven assortment of villainies, smiling grimly whenever anyone addresses him as "Mossoo"; and Mr. Gene Gerrard is to be complimented on making quite a handful of bricks out of no visible straw. In the matter of the ladies Miss Dolores Farris performs with incredible virtuosity a dance as exacting as it is ungainly; Miss Vera Pearce, that clever actress, is as usual steadily wasted; Miss Laye, fragrant as ever, takes the quarter-deck with the grace of an Austin Dobson marquise. It should not need saying that there is good balfing as well as bad. I take this to be, on the whole, good, though how many times this moon will wax and wane before she is worn out it is not for me to predict with any accuracy. Let me make a shot and say a year, or whatever time is necessary to engender another and similar entertainment.

INFINITE BOSH

" *The Infinite Shoeblack* " : *a play. By Norman Macowan. Arts Theatre,* 12 *April,* 1929.

Mary's drawing-room in Cairo, attained after many vicissitudes, boasted a grand piano and its stool. It was an odd stool. One knows those post-impressionist ladies by Matisse who gaze soulfully into mirrors over high mantel-pieces while sitting on chairs three inches from the floor. Only a heroine of these elegant disproportions could have sat on Mary's stool and played Mary's piano. But Mary did not attempt it. One insists upon the stool and the piano because their disparity was typical of the play. But first to Mary's vicissitudes. These were many. Let me take for starting point that fainting fit which caused Mary to collapse upon the doorstep of an Edinburgh brothel, kept by the properest old lady who ever wore a mutch. One of the rooms in the brothel was let to Andrew Berwick in return for four shillings a week and advice as to how the old lady should invest her ill-gotten gains. Blench not, reader ! The fact that the house is a brothel is not of the slightest consequence, has nothing to do with the story, and will not be referred to again. While the young lady was fainting a discussion was going on in Andrew's room. Andrew, being a dab at mathematics, was obviously going to carry off top honours in his forthcoming student's examination; his friend Ralph Mayne was as obviously going to fail. But Mayne's father had promised him £1000 a year if he succeeded. So Mayne proposed that they should put each other's names at the tops of their papers, in return for which he would pay Andrew £200 a year. Andrew said " No " in floods of Gaelic, and at this point the fainting lady was brought in. Mary, recovering consciousness, quoted yards and yards of Carlyle, explaining her facility on the grounds that her father had been a historian. The old gentleman had died and consigned her to the care of a maiden aunt living in a country-side whose only distraction was a barracks a mile and a half away. One reflected that even

the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Dashwood would have had difficulty in supporting such isolation. Anyhow, Mary wouldn't put up with it, and promptly took to that life for which there is no euphemism. "I am Aspasia!" she cried to Andrew, and quoted more Carlyle. But she was starving all the same. A doctor declaring that Mary was suffering from cerebral neurasthenia, and could only be restored by six months in Spain, Andrew agreed to his friend's pact, accepted the shameful £200, and despatched Mary to her Spanish watering-place, greatly to the disgust, I imagine, of the brothel-keeper balked of her windfall.

Then the war intervened, and we were taken to Cairo and heard of one Colonel Drover, the ardour of whose military duties was relieved by—whom does the reader think? The reader has guessed rightly. It was indeed Mary who was the Colonel's mistress, though Andrew would not believe it. To put matters to the test he accepted Mary's invitation to dinner. After dinner:

Tous deux ils regardaient, de la haute terrasse,
L'Egypte s'endormir sous un ciel étouffant—

as Heredia puts it. But alike under the Egyptian canopy, "the air, look you," as under Andrew's Scottish roof Mary still spouted her Carlyle, this time with a pleasing admixture of Swinburne. She proclaimed herself "the infinite shoeblack," but also yearned for:

The ache of purple pulses, and the bliss
Of blinded eyelids that expand again.

Whereupon Andrew said that the ache and the bliss demanded benefit of clergy. He proposed marriage, even exacted it; and his price for the indescribable rapture of union with himself, the penniless Gael, was that Mary should renounce all her lovers and the £4,000 a year which her aunt, who lived a mile and a half from barracks, had left her. Mary, after toying momentarily with her pearls, leaped at the proposal. Or, to continue:

Tournant sa tête pâle entre les cheveux bruns
Vers celui qu'enivraient d'invincibles parfums,
Elle tendit sa bouche et ses prunelles claires.

But Heredia's Antony gazing into Cleopatra's eyes there read vacillation, while Andrew in Mary's pupils read nothing of the sort. Indeed, she did not vacillate, but went

back to Andrew's modest Scotch home, had a baby, and died declaring that Carlyle was right.

This astonishing rigmarole was performed in the grand manner which alone can cover up nonsensicality, Mr. Leslie Banks and Miss Mary Newcomb persuading us more than once that the piece was veering away from complete silliness and in the direction of sense. But the theatre cannot have it both ways. It cannot make erring ladies expire on drawing-room sofas and ladies desisting from erring do the same thing. It is no answer to say that Mary might have died. She might. She might also have been run over by a tramcar, and tramcars are not drama. I say that this piece is bosh, because I do not believe that milk-fever is the inevitable consequence of giving up £4,000 a year. There are, of course, many people for whom milk-fever is one dramatic event, and any renunciation another, while for them two events necessarily constitute a sequence. *Tant mieux!* To such playgoers this lively piece may be heartily commended.

FINITE BOSH

"The Shanghai Gesture": a play. By John Colton. Venturers Society, 12 *May,* 1929.

This play relates how the proprietress of another brothel, in Shanghai this time, to revenge herself upon the Englishman who betrayed her twenty years ago sells his daughter into that which it is customary to describe as "worse than slavery." Let us agree at once that *The Shanghai Gesture* is the most exciting account of this sort of crime followed by that sort of punishment which the melodramatic stage has yet given us. The production by the Venturers Society brought forth indignant protests from a number of people who did not see the play, and we may perhaps usefully recall that when Claudius, King of Denmark put his familiar question: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?" he was interrogating somebody who had not only seen *The Mouse Trap* but was part-author of that play. To whom, we must ask, and in what respect is *The Shanghai Gesture* offensive? The Chinese? The English? Or can it be both? Is Chinese susceptibility wounded at the exhibition of young women in cages? Or do the cages constitute the libel? One may perhaps hold that whether these wicker affairs or Maupassant's seedy drawing-rooms are the fashion is really immaterial. The main fact is the kind of establishment, and I see no reason why an American playwright should not have his "Tea-house of Mother Godam" as Maupassant has his "Maison Tellier." Is it objected that there is a difference between washing the linen of one's own country, and that of somebody else's? But surely there must be some give and take in these matters? We should not, I think, object if some Chinese Edgar Wallace were to represent the Achilles statue as the midnight parking place of London's motor-bandits and the hub of English society. No Chinaman is going to believe that every Londoner is a car-thief, and no Englishman will hold that in China all the young women are caged birds. Does the play offend as a representation of English manners? The answer is, only in

the way in which we are accustomed to being offended. *The Shanghai Gesture* is not the first play to demonstrate what happens when mandarins invite dissolute young Englishmen to meet their daughters. But it is another matter to suggest that every British resident without exception is in the habit of wriggling under the thumbs of blackmailing procuresses. Then how about the English girl, that is, the girl whom we take to be English until the very end of the play, and who is at all times opium-smoker, drunkard, and hussy? This play is potentially filmable and would, but for a vigilant censorship, be shown all over China. Is it not arguable that for the English-speaking races to inveigh against the opium-trade and at the same time contemplate the making, selling and showing of films exhibiting their young women indulging in the drug is yet one more example of the old hypocrisy?

What of this play as adult entertainment? Let me confess that I should not be surprised to hear that the author had, like somebody before him, patted himself on the back for his astonishing moderation. To be horrified one must first believe, and I have seldom believed less. I could not believe that the omnipotent and wealthy Madame Godam would live at her place of business—over the shop, so to speak. Nor could I believe in the place itself, that swept and tidy palace with its twelve Chippendale chairs and the spiral staircase which looked as if it had come out of the pages of *Theatre Arts Monthly*. Nor in the drab young woman who, upon the application of soap and water, revealed a beauty more than Circassian. "Heat the bath!" said Betsey Trotwood on a famous occasion. "Mr. Dick sets us all right." Perhaps it was this echo which finally banished credibility. I certainly could not believe in Miss Cathleen Nesbitt's Madame Godam, unless I am to hold that these unpardonable beldams acquire a majesty exceeding that of Catherine of Russia, and Rachel trying a fall with "Andromaque" put together. But all this does not say that one was not entertained. Miss Nesbitt certainly put up a very good, subtle, and ingenious show of what her author doubtless intended her to exhibit. The long recital of her character's early sufferings was the kind of Sardovian cataract for the sake of which Bernhardt

would undoubtedly have accepted this part though the play written round it had been about a chicken-farm. Miss Nesbitt seemed here to carry less than the guns the greatest actresses trot out on these occasions. At the end of each atrocious item Miss Nesbitt had to say : " I survived ! " But what she said was : " Ai survayved ! " and this little bit of Kensington reminded us that it was only play-acting. Nevertheless it was play-acting of a highly accomplished order. There is a growing custom, whenever any part is totally unplayable, to send for Mr. S. J. Warmington, who has been roundly abused by my colleagues for his unpleasant Englishman. I shall obstinately maintain that Mr. Warmington extricated himself from an impossible rôle more than commendably. To finish with the acting, let me say that Miss Hermione Baddeley as the nasty little English girl gave a nice little performance.

In conclusion, *The Shanghai Gesture* is emphatically not a play with which to make another onslaught upon the Censorship. It contains no new truth which it is important for us to know, and no old one which is not threadbare. It is not a work of art, and in suppressing it the Censorship has not destroyed anything that matters. So let there be no taunting of a hard-worked and well-intentioned department !

SYBIL BAGS A BRACE

" *Jane Clegg* " : *revival of St. John Ervine's play.*
" *The ' Medea ' of Euripides* " : *Professor Gilbert Murray's translation. Wyndham's Theatre,* 29 *May,* 1929.

If there is anything more fatal in the theatre than a triple bill it is a double bill—a theatrical truism which playgoers will seldom get a more honourable chance of refuting than they have this week at Wyndham's Theatre —honourable because both plays in the new programme are the finest of their kind. To praise Euripides at this time of day is rather like praising the Andes or the Atlantic Ocean ; this play, like those other masterpieces, can get along without commendation. But it would be equally foolish not to praise very highly Mr. St. John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*, since this work is probably its author's best, and is certainly the finest example of what, for better or worse, is known as the Manchester School.

How good exactly is *Jane Clegg?* The late William Archer formulated three tests ; and to these, since I have never been able to come across any more discerning ones, I propose to submit Mr. Ervine's work. Is a play true to the visible and audible surfaces of life ? *Jane Clegg* passes this test triumphantly. Everything that takes place in this play is reasonable and probable, and the whole thing hangs together perfectly. Some plays give one the impression of having been made to fit only by miracles of ingenuity ; you feel that they got out of hand a dozen times and that the author only got them right again after infinities of tinkering and correction. Not so this play, which, you are convinced as you watch it, could never have gone wrong. There are no implications here as to the author's method. Mr. Ervine may have written *Jane Clegg* in twenty-four hours, just as Shakespeare according to Mr. Masefield threw off the greater part of *Macbeth* at a sitting. Or he may, like Ibsen, have worked at it for two years. The proportions of inspiration and artifice are the artist's business.

Archer's second test was : Does a play make the best use of the mechanism of the theatre, and beget in the audience high suspense and vivid realisation ? I suggest that *Jane Clegg* again comes through with flying colours. To me the story always seems immensely exciting, and it is certainly perfectly marshalled. Readers who have not seen this play should, perhaps, be told that it is about a commercial traveller who steals his firm's cheque and pretends to his wife that he has used the money to settle gambling debts, when actually it has gone to pay for the passage to Canada of himself and his mistress. It may be objected that this is a sordid story. Quite. It is not denied that Henry Clegg's activities are sordid. But perfection is a quality, whether it has to do with the police court or the mountain-top. And this brings me to Archer's third test. In seeing or reading *Jane Clegg*, have we not merely enjoyed a pastime, but undergone an experience ? The answer is in the affirmative, granted always that the experience is concerned with truth as well as beauty. Everybody has had the experience of sitting in the theatre and waiting for the true thing which is never said, or, worse still, of fidgeting about while palpable untruths are being ladled out. In *Jane Clegg* we have the contrary experience —that of seeing the nail hit fairly and squarely on the head. We know all about Jane, and vengeance on Jenny's case is not Mr. Ervine's particular business. What he strives to show, and shows abundantly, is the case to be made out for the wretched husband. It seems to me that there is final truth in Henry Clegg's apology :

" I'm not a bad chap, really. I'm just weak. I'd be all right if I had a lot of money and a wife that wasn't better than I am. It doesn't do a chap much good to be living with a woman who's his superior—at least, not the sort of chap I am. I ought to have married a woman like myself, or a bit worse. That's what Kitty is. She's worse than I am, and that sort of makes me love her. It's different with you. I always feel mean here. Yes, I am mean. I know that ; but it makes me meaner than I really am to be living with you."

It is this absolute truth which gives Mr. Ervine's play its quality of tragic dignity. For the play is essentially

a tragedy. It is the tragedy of a husband mated with a wife whose self-command forbids her to despise him, but whose feeling for right makes her an impossible companion for one whose instincts are wrong. Half the art of the theatre is preparation, and the way in which the catastrophe is led up to is a little miracle of deftness. Henry says he cannot produce the cheque because it is in his bag, which he has left at the station. His wife knows that he is lying, and her lack of sympathy plus her righteous sense will not consent that Henry shall play for time. Instead she pounces, saying with cold precision : " You didn't take your bag with you this morning." And we know that no part of Canada will freeze Henry more than this so unhelpful helpmeet. The piece would be worth going to see if it were only for Miss Clare Greet, who as the elder Mrs. Clegg stands for all the mothers of all the world's scapegraces. There is a moderate performance by Mr. Peter Ridgeway of the rat-like little book-maker, Mr. Munce, and a capital portrayal of a cashier by Mr. William Fazan. Mr. Lewis Casson, who was born to play apostles of righteousness, was bound to have a certain difficulty with Henry Clegg. Nevertheless he buckled on the armour of unrighteousness with such good-will that it almost appeared as though the lascivious suit had been made for him, which it wasn't. Miss Sybil Thorndike, as usual, made no extraordinary attempt to do anything with the part, and so achieved everything that is in it. Her turn of the head and the look she gave Henry when she heard about the other woman and said " Judas ! " made the audience sit up as it always sits up in that Symphony in which Beethoven wakes up after his forty winks.

Perhaps one may say that Jane is a part which a good actress will fill more easily than your world-tearing virtuoso, where the temptation must always be to substitute for the much-tried middle-class woman Duse's wasted angel or Bernhardt's misplaced enchantress. All that need be said about Miss Thorndike's Jane is that she is effortless and perfect. But the actress who can play Jane perfectly and make a very fair shot at Medea must, one thinks, be something more than good. It is extraordinary how many great actresses have fought shy of the Euripidean

hell-cat who is ten thousand Rosa Dartles rolled into one. Rachel ordered a play on the subject from Legouvé, collaborator with Scribe in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, rehearsed her part, threw up the play, was ordered by the French courts to appear in it, and preferred to pay damages. Though I recollect a caricature of Bernhardt in the part, I can remember no account of her performance in it. Our own Mrs. Siddons declined to have anything to do with anybody's Medea, though both Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Yates are said to have " sustained the character with remarkable success." W. G. Wills, who could adapt anybody from Goethe to Goldsmith, not forgetting Cervantes and Malory, tried his hand at Legouvé's play for Miss Bateman, and, since tenderness rather than rage was this actress's *forte*, laid stress upon Medea's maternal affections ! One judges the greatest impersonation to have been Ristori's in an Italian version drawn from Legouvé. Then there was " Little " Robson's burlesque of Ristori, which was so terrific that it might have been the real thing and actually wrung admiration from the actress herself. What a witless age we must live in now that we do not invite Miss Nellie Wallace to give us " a slight idea of " Jane and Medea rounding upon their respective spouses !

The actress who is to rescue Euripides from the charge of mere Grand-Guignolism must be able so to swing the pendulum that we regard her first with the maximum of pity and then with the maximum of loathing. Even so I doubt whether an audience which has heard Lady Macduff's " God help thee, poor monkey ! But how wilt thou do for a father ? " and known Macduff's subsequent scene will ever be greatly moved by this human tigress. It is useless to pretend that post-Shakespeareans can look at things in the Greek way. Macbeth's tragedy is Macbeth's responsibility and therefore human, and so a subject for human pity. Whereas Medea was only the sport of the gods—a tremendous matter in those days, but a different thing now that the essence of tragedy is declared to be that which has roots in avoidable human weakness. Miss Thorndike does what she can with Medea—that is, she presents her as a woman hardly used by circumstance. But her Medea at her most violent is still a creature of reason ; you feel that

there is a good deal to be said for her. Now it is unreason which terrifies and has the power to make you feel that the actress is creating an abyss in which the whole universe of human motive and consequence is swallowed up. Medea contemplating the murder should be as terrifying as the Messenger who tells of its carrying-out, and honesty compels me to suggest that at Wyndham's unbearable horror began and ended with the Messenger's recital. In other words, we believed the Messenger when he recounted what had happened, but did not quite believe Medea when she proposed the matter. Nevertheless, Miss Thorndike's performance was a fine one, and taken in conjunction with the earlier rôle constituted a great achievement. Mr. Casson as Jason looked very noble ; Mr. Fazan as the Attendant showed that a good actor will never be at a loss by however many centuries and climes he may be miscast ; Mr. Peter Ridgeway cheerfully discarded the bookie's white bowler to assume the snowy thatch of the senile King of Athens ; Mr. Carleton Hobbs did nicely with Creon ; and Miss Margaret Webster, with six attendant nymphs, achieved befittingly all those things which befit a Greek Chorus. But why a number of young ladies should interrupt harsh barbaric action to recite Swinburnean odes of great polish is something which one who is not a Greek scholar has given up hope of understanding. Whether Mr. Casson's two excellent and totally different performances would have been better if he had not produced, and whether, alternatively, the production would have been better if Mr. Casson had moped in a corner is a matter into which I shall leave other critics to peradventure. And if there is no such verb it's a pity !

"*Mariette*": *comédie musicale. By Sacha Guitry. Music by Oscar Straus. His Majesty's Theatre,* 3 *June,* 1929.

"*Caprice*": *a play. By Sil-Vara. Adapted by Philip Moeller. St. James's Theatre,* 4 *June,* 1929.

"An two men ride on a horse, one must ride behind," is as near the quotation as makes no matter. But what would Dogberry have said if he had been judge at a horse show? Would he have laid it down that of two equal exhibits one must be put behind the other? A phrase has been coined to meet the difficulty: the judge in such cases "cannot separate them." So, too, I cannot separate the lovely performances of this week's two teams of visitors.

But then, I don't particularly want to separate them, for both achieve the same kind of merit, or even kinds of merit. Both are conquests over dullness, keeping the spectator agog with excitement, and alive with that happy expectation which is the mark of true enjoyment in the theatre. Both have banished boredom so that it is not even in the offing. Both are true theatre, in that both convey a quality of delight which could not be had elsewhere, between the covers of a book for example. It is unimaginable that either play should, as they say, read well. Both plays have sparkle, though neither is good in the stodgy English sense—in the way in which, in Mr. Bennett's novel, Mrs. Baines's furniture was "good." On leaving both theatres we are not the richer except intellectually and aesthetically; and this, as Shelley long ago pointed out, is the only profit with which works of art are concerned. The piece about Prince Louis Napoleon and Mariette takes it for granted that the spectator's literary taste leans more to Mr. Philip Guedella than to the penny-a-liner's babblings about uncrowned queens. The play about the American lawyer and his mistress suggests that Balzac was right when he laid it down that Nature made the female but that Civilisation created woman. Both plays, let it be said, move in the same world, though in different

centuries. The one world is still exquisite, while the other contrives to remain polite. Both, finally, call for a sophisticated audience. The French piece, albeit no more than an operette, has something of the footnote to history, and though its texture is of the lightest you feel that it is strong enough to bear the weight of pathos and of irony. M. Guitry's writing, though it may be nothing to read, has on the stage all that non-seeming strength which is the proper quality of gossamer. You must bring your mind to it. The Viennese play makes other demands upon the spectator hearing it performed by American actors. It demands that we shall abjure the childishness of believing an English accent to be nearer the Viennese than an American. It has been objected, too, that these American players talk too often against one another, that is at the same time. Quite. If two people converse in a room, two will often be talking at once. But the producer of this play is not an ass, and has in no instance allowed his actors to rage together when it was necessary that we should bring our single mind to what any one actor was singly saying.

What a lovely thing it is to sit once more in a theatre which could never be mistaken for a schoolroom or a lecture hall and watch actors who could never be mistaken for barristers or tax-gatherers out of their vocation ! The theatre is in every Frenchman's blood : it is a part of his consciousness whereas it is an imposition upon ours. The French are a nation of actors in the best sense, by which one means that their temperament is more fluid. " I am, therefore I act," is the French dictum. A moderately clever dramatist could have given us that first act of *Mariette*, the stage of a provincial opera-house seen from the back, with the singers hurling their dithyrambs in grand, nonsensical gestures at the yawning, shrouded cavern which is the auditorium. But only a great actor could have sat in that box and by his half-bovine, half-imperial impassivity and a few portentous claps of his heavily kid-gloved hands conveyed so much of reality. All great comedians live with the intensity of puppets, and it is the highest compliment to M. Guitry to say that that motionless figure in the box was as much alive as the pianist

in the little wooden concert-party we saw recently at the Scala. In the scene in the foyer the figure began to take more particular shape, and, helped by the hat which Gavarni might have drawn, an air of semi-majesty and faint self-mockery, the habit of adjusting the hair at the side of the head, and the whispered phrase : " Il faut tâcher de ne pas être ridicule ! "—by these things we were made to feel that we were in the presence of the third Napoleon. Is it possible that Mlle. Yvonne Printemps a little overstresses the *gaucherie* of Mariette, just as she holds on a little too long to her top notes, and a little over-does the intimacy of her curtains at the end of each act ? I strew ashes on my head for writing this sentence : but it must remain. For the rest this delicious artist's fun, high spirits, charm, delicacy, and suggestion of pathos remain the miracles of deftness that they always were. In my view the epilogue or last act is a mistake. It has only one point—that at a hundred the memory is shaky. But to show Mariette and Mlle. Printemps in the winter of life is to exchange nostalgia and faint melancholy for the bleak horrors of a realism which I personally find unbearable. Here the piece changes key, and it is as though Maupassant's exquisite " Menuet " has been re-written by a Zola, or a Fragonard redrawn by a Goerg. It remains only to say of this first piece that Oscar Straus's music is charming.

Caprice is a brilliant comedy of the most subtle texture counter-changed by an admirable wit. Every line is a challenge to the understanding, and the play constantly surprises by the faithfulness of its values. Those who know no elderly Viennese rakes must hope that all of this kind are like Mr. Alfred Lunt's *roué*, whose urbanity under stress must surely be one of the finest products of civilisation. It is impossible not to recognise something of the impish humour which delighted all who knew the late Avery Hopwood. But even without this recollection Mr. Lunt's portrait of an overgrown child bristles with veracity. Nor can there be any doubting the truth of Mr. Douglass Montgomery's son. Robert is the callow German youth to the life, the mixture we all know of poet and peasant, of the youth now poring on the brook that babbles by,

now rushing, as a colleague has accurately and unappreciatively observed, "across a drawing-room like a bull-elephant." The boy's gait, which must either sidle or charge, the stainless inexperience coupled with infinite cocksureness about Life and Love and all the things that begin with capital letters, this strange compound of rawness and *Schwärmerei* are reproduced by Mr. Montgomery with a sincerity which almost takes our breath away. Last there remains Miss Lynn Fontanne, whose talent is established before she has opened her lips. Some day somebody must tell us what it is that proclaims the great player, that determines our verdict before we have heard the evidence. Can it be that coming brilliance projects an aura before it? There is never question of mistake. Réjane had only to appear on the stage, and suddenly it was as though the lights had gone up. Miss Fontanne has this quality. After she has played for some time we begin to note the accessories of her art, her gifts of mime and expression, her changes of intensity and varieties of emphasis, her knack of persuading you that every word comes from her brain. Then you note certain physical attributes, say, her way of walking as though the boards were moorland turf. Or you might say, as one has always said of Sorel, that she takes the stage like a battleship, only in her case it is a light cruiser. Perhaps one might sum up the whole thing in the actress's implication of style. It is certain that only very accomplished and highly ordered playing could have moved through this piece—which might be *Fata Morgana* re-written by Schnitzler—without calamity. As it was, the actress rode play and evening triumphantly.

TCHEHOV TRIUMPHANT

" The Sea-Gull " : revival of Anton Tchehov's play. Fortune Theatre, 25 September, 1929.

The spectators who emerged from the first performances of Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* must have resolved to a man never again to wave the banner of the ideal. Between eleven and twelve on the first night of Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice* more than one prison governor was certainly rung up. Who can doubt that if *Mrs. Warren's Profession* had been performed in the year in which it was written we should all have indited urgent letters to the papers demanding a rise in wages for barmaids in railway refreshment-rooms ? Tchehov is not of the order of effectual angels. He is not filled with righteous wrath against anything or anybody ; as Calderon points out, he would not have condemned the Pharisees, but would have written short stories to explain their attitude. " People are like this ! " is all that Tchehov has to say about his characters ; they are static in the sense that nothing can be done about them. Almost you might say that they are figures on a Russian urn. Kostya, beside that lake, will never write, and Nina will never act, that play ; nor ever will their lives be anything but bare. And so it goes on. Take all the characters in *The Sea-Gull*, and note how they are fixed in time almost as a photograph is fixed. Throughout eternity Madame Arkadin will be an egotistical, chattering first-rate actress, jealous of her son ; Nina, the indifferent actress, will know vanity and passion and be betrayed by her lack of art and by Trigorin ; Trigorin, the second-rate writer and lover, will fish in his own emotions for the stuff of future novels and write down his catches in a little book. To the end of time each of the half-dozen lovers in this play will pursue another and see that other in pursuit of someone else. Then there are the quests other than those of love and glory. Trigorin has fame, but does not value it : he would have his youth again. Sorin, dying, clutches at the life which has passed him by ; Medvedenko wants affection ; Masha seeks an anodyne ; the doctor wants to talk and put

his little world right about everything. His desires alone are fulfilled : all others in this play are frustrate.

Looking on at the piece one has the sensation of gazing at a photograph of a group of people, all of whom are dead. The personages in *The Sea-Gull* are doubly dead. There was never anything to be remedied about Madam Arkadin, Nina, Konstantin and the rest, for the simple reason that there is never anything to be done about anybody unless they do it themselves. (There was never anything to be done about Ibsen's flag-waver, though one felt that later Hilmars might be discouraged from making idealistic asses of themselves.) But something has happened in Russia, or we are told that it has. The Russia of Madame Arkadin has passed away. Even she was conscious of that passing : " Ten or fifteen years ago there were six big country-houses round the shore. It was all laughter, and noise, and the firing of guns, and love-making, love-making without end." To-day they have something else to do in Russia besides making love. But it is precisely because Tchehov's drifting, hopeless lovers have passed away that they are imperishable. Whether their passing is good for them is not the point. There is too much making free with other people's lives to suit our own comfort, too much easy fortitude kin to that of Scotch elders happy to see their daughters coffined at their feet rather than endure their existence outside the Scotch canon. Schiller patted Gustavus Adolphus on the back for making his exit at thirty-eight before he had time to abuse his new-found power, and only the other day some noodle congratulated Nelson upon dying before Emma had time to weary him with her vulgarities. There is too much of this " better dead " nonsense. Whether annihilation and being in Hamlet's sense " reformed altogether " is what Tchehov's world would have best desired for itself is not our concern ; the point is that in Tchehov's art that world lives for ever.

There has been some talk of brightening the present production, presumably by taking the action a little faster and by a greater insistence upon the play's comic aspects. This is an old story. Whenever any English producer finds melancholy in *The Cherry Orchard* somebody is sure to point out that Tchehov wrote the thing as a farce ; and

indeed in this author there is always more of Bunthorne's innocent fun than the casual critic might imagine. But in *The Sea-Gull* there is surely every excuse for a Gummidgean atmosphere. Every creetur' in this play is lone ; every one is lorn ; and " everythink goes contrairy " with all of them. The play is one huge haystack of despondency, with not more than three tiny needles of glinting humour. Presumably it is not for nothing that Masha pirouettes to that melancholy waltz, and that Sorin prates about gusto from his bath-chair. And then there is Shamraev, the steward, whose obsession about old actors must be meant for comic relief after the manner of Gaev's billiards in *The Cherry Orchard* and Kosykh's incessant bridge chatter in *Ivanov*. But there the humour in this play ends. Now, if Calderon is right in insisting that Tchehov's characters " see their misfortunes, without malice, from the remote comedic point of view," it may be that the finest playing of Tchehov would show his characters agonising, so to speak, at one remove. In the present production Masha and Sorin, when they speak, become centres of tragedy instead of remaining decorations to more important woe. Is it just possible that the most faithful way of dealing with Tchehov would be to play him for a little less than he is worth ? Certainly the Russian players we have seen over here make non-underlining their principal virtue. Personally I shall not fall foul of the present producer or his methods, though it may be that Mr. Filmer feels Tchehov's tragedy " more than anybody else." But I am going to confess that I like him to feel it so, for the simple reason that the piece and the playing and the production as I saw them on the second night at the Fortune Theatre filled me with as poignant a pleasure as I am capable of feeling. On the whole I am not for speeding up this production. Tchehov's drama is not a dirt-track. Perhaps the music played " off " at the end of the first act should have been Chopin instead of Glinka. Perhaps also the setting for the fourth act should have been darker in tone, with the window at the back set further away from the audience. But producers are only human, and the deep from which they must conjure up their treasures may not always be vasty enough. Anyhow, Mr. James Whale's

first and second settings are still lovely, and the lighting throughout was excellent.

It is certain that there needs no producer come from Moscow to tell Miss Miriam Lewes how to play Madame Arkadin. Her interpretation is extraordinarily subtle and perceptive, her voice and her inflections are admirably just, and her use of arms and hands constitutes one of the most brilliant pieces of fulfillment of and embroidery to meaning I have seen for many a long day. In short, until I see a better performance I shall regard this actress's Madame Arkadin as perfect. Miss Valerie Taylor has deepened the beauty of her first three acts, though she now, I think, underplays the last act a little. Or can it be that with increased familiarity the emotional shock is less? Nevertheless I suggest that Miss Taylor might heighten the note here and give, as she did before, the impression of physical distress, want, and hunger. But nearly all her acting is lovely, and I offer her congratulations on the complete disappearance of what was once a faulty enunciation. Mr. Glen Byam Shaw as Konstantin is a little overweighted by the last act, but excellent elsewhere. That careful actor, Mr. Martin Lewis, makes a fair shot at Trigorin, who wants more presence and authority; Miss Margaret Swallow does, perhaps, too complete justice to Masha; and Mr. Oliver Johnston, though acting well, just fails to give us all he knows about Sorin. But the play is a very difficult one, and to ask for its perfect presentation is to demand at least ten performances of genius.

A FEAST OF ACTING

"*French Leave*" : *revival of the farce by Reginald Berkeley. Vaudeville Theatre, 7 January,* 1930.

Frightful dissensions are rife about Mr. Laughton's assumption of General Root in this jolly revival. But surely dissension can only have come about through confusing the thing attempted with the success or non-success of the attempt. Mr. Laughton has been blamed not because his performance fails to evoke salvoes of laughter —his success in this respect is freely admitted—but because it does not keep to the received truth concerning Brigadiers. It has been said that his General is too preposterous a figure of fun to be a credible portrait. But what about caricature, where not credibility but preposterousness is the test? When Gilbert writes of:

Captain Reece,
Commanding of *The Mantelpiece*—

it would be foolish to complain that *The Mantelpiece* is not a likely name for a battleship. *Pace* rationalist objectors, Mr. Laughton's Brigadier is a creation of pure joy. How Gilbert would have doted on this monarch of the humours, twin-brother to his own King Borria Bungalee Boo, whose sigh was a hullaballoo. Here is the spirit which informed Dickens's Colonel Wugsby. Does the reader pretend that there is no such person? The pretence is vain; when Dickens drew Mrs. Colonel Wugsby he also drew her Commander-in-Chief. The point about Mr. Laughton's performance is that it *is* a performance, meaning a piece of deliberate acting and not the normal, hand-in-glove, round-peg-in-round-hole miracle of coincidence. Does a part require a smooth, thin, inarticulate young man? Your manager bethinks him of one such. Is a beetle-browed, black-avised fellow called for? Your manager played golf with him yesterday. It would have been the easiest thing in the world to ring up some actor who specialises in choleric clubsters, since he is one himself, and invite him to put civilian testiness into military uniform. But felicities of this order have no more to do

with acting than changing the labels on bottles has to do with the wine. Consider, after the manner of an older school of criticism, the physical material with which Mr. Laughton must build up this character. The actor is young. His figure is podgy and devoid of any approach to military bearing. His features are dumpling : you might liken them to a broad champaign of flat, moon-struck rather than moon-lit country. All this makes an admirable actor's mask just because, like Coquelin's mask, in repose it means nothing. Nearly all great comic actors are alike, because all their countenances are alike in that they resemble lumps of clay waiting for the modeller, or ground cleared for the builder. The image varies, but the fact remains.

Mark, too, one feature which every great comedian has had—the long upper lip. This was enormous in the case of Coquelin, and is to be remarked in the portraits of such actors as Shuter, Foote, and Toole. To-day Mr. Seymour Hicks, Mr. Frank Cellier, and Mr. Laughton all possess what the French call " the comedian's lip." But good character-acting must be more than the use of a good mask supplemented by the arts of penciller and wig-maker. It requires more even than mere control of the facial muscles, that " code of symbols waiting for the executant purpose to combine and recombine them into rich and curious significances." Executive purpose for what ? The answer is : Intense apprehension of, and joy in, the character to be presented. Then, again, good character-acting, like good art-work of any kind, must not only carry the artist's signature, but must bear the impress of his mind. It was said of a popular musical-comedy actress that before essaying the rôle of Cleopatra she made herself " personally acquainted with all the mummies in the British Museum." I understand that Mr. Laughton, when he took up his present part, went to look again at the Orpen portraits in the Imperial War Museum, with the result that his Brigadier is a reproduction of all that Sir William Orpen made us see in the more serious medium. It follows, too, that the caricature is not mean. The extravagance is high-spirited, gross, and palpable ; it is the kind of joke which Mr. Boythorn would have roared at you across his dinner-table.

Indeed, this revival is rich in good acting. Mr. Emlyn

Williams gives a performance of a French interpreter which to those who have known any French interpreters is miraculously happy. Mr. Charles Groves repeats his fastidiously accurate presentation of a corporal of the old Army. These three performances make a great feast of acting in three styles, since three fine artists are here seen expressing themselves respectively in flamboyant caricature, the sensitive art of the portraitist, and the meticulous business of the photographer. If the play were a comedy a remark might be made here. But it is farce, and farce is a mill to which all grist that is good is good grist. Miss Madeleine Carroll and Mr. James Raglan are a little disinclined to sink themselves sufficiently in the play's hurly-burly. Both give good performances, but should remember that the play is not theirs. Mr. Edward Scott-Gatty pleases as a subaltern, new style. Perhaps, on the first night, the loudest laughter was that which greeted the absurd colloquy between the entirely uncomprehending General and the totally voluble French hag. The beldam was played by an actress whom I may not mention, for a similar reason to that which deprived us of Mr. Max Beerbohm's views upon his brother's acting. It is a hard thing that critical etiquette should have grounds so relative as this.

MR. PERCY'S HAMLET

"*Hamlet*": *revival of Shakespeare's tragedy. Court Theatre,* 12 *February,* 1930.

Mr. Peter Godfrey's production is a nice compromise between the exiguous Elizabethan stage—platform, balcony, and cubby-hole—and the columnar, jigsaw arrangements beloved of Mr. Gordon Craig. Such a setting at once brings up the question : How exactly did Shakespeare see his plays when he was writing them ? Did he visualise the battlements at Elsinore and in the mind's eye follow the Ghost round about the castle ? Did he imagine one room in which Ophelia should walk, another to serve as theatre for the play, another for the Queen's closet ? Did he think of some familiar churchyard for Ophelia's burial ? Or did he uniquely consider the stage on which his play was to be performed and how he was going to get the best out of its three planes ? Probably everybody will answer this question according to the way in which he reads his Shakespeare. The poet drew prodigies of virtue out of bare necessity, but that does not prove that necessity is virtue. The best argument for the simplified setting of Shakespeare is the saving of time and the preservation of continuity. But it is hard to believe that the revolving-stage, which a National Theatre would presumably possess, would hurt the play of *Hamlet* more than the consent wrung forcibly from us that Ophelia shall be buried in the middle of Gertrude's closet. Given the occasional revival of Shakespeare's plays by private, limited enterprise, there can be no doubt that the method adopted by Mr. Godfrey at the Court Theatre is the best. It asks a good deal, but then the practised Shakespearean playgoer is prepared to give a good deal. It is almost the case of the willing seller and the willing buyer. I think that possibly Mr. Godfrey goes too far in making the Ghost shed his ghostliness and in depriving Ophelia of her flowers and thus reducing her to that kind of pantomime whereby elderly music-hall comedians are wont to indicate how young ladies do their hair. Again I think that though most Hamlets are too much i' the sun of

the scene's dead-centre, it is a mistake to keep this one too much i' the shade. The seating at the Court Theatre is admirable, yet from where I sat Hamlet, being round the corner, was invisible for quite considerable periods. For Mr. Godfrey's arrangement of the text there can be nothing but praise, the action gathering momentum through the Play, Recorders, and Closet Scenes, and taking the Worm and Emperor speech in its stride right up to " My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth " before we are given our one and only breather. But I must register one protest against cutting a single line in this, the finest of all the soliloquies, and another against making the Ghost in the Closet Scene so inaudible as to render his words incomprehensible to anybody who should not know them by heart.

Mr. Esmé Percy did not fail as Hamlet, because he is too good an actor to fail in anything from Puck to Lear. I have mentioned Puck because this Hamlet seemed very nearly as carefree. Writing of Fechter's Hamlet, the first thing that Lewes observes is that " his aspect and bearing are such that the eye rests on him with delight ; our sympathies are completely secured." When Mr. Percy appeared our eye rested on him with astonishment, and our apprehensions were immediately aroused. Hamlet, as his mother reminded us and as Goethe insisted, was fat. But *pace* these authorities, we cannot consent that Hamlet should be cherubic to the point almost of being chubby. When Hamlet debates the question of being or not being, we ought to feel that the matter has been vexing his bosom ever since his father died. Mr. Percy made the speech a metaphysical exercise newly happened upon, and delivered it with undergraduate relish, and as though he were addressing the Oxford Union. He did not take up arms against his sea of troubles so much as bob up and down upon them like a cork. He had little pathos, hardly anything of the mournful grace that Hamlet should possess, and none of the tenderness which, when Forbes-Robertson played, wetted every eye. He was never fey or fore-doomed, never elegiac. At the words, " What, frighted with false fire ? " Hamlet should tower over the King. Mr. Percy was almost puny here ; and when later he stood on a contraption which raised him a foot from the floor he was still, metaphorically speaking,

inches shorter than Claudius. It may be argued that Kean was a little man. But then Kean, when it came to passion, was "a terror for his size." Mr. Percy, though vigorous, was never dæmonic, and in this scene, in which Hamlet at last lets himself go, there must be dæmonism. It was unfortunate that he delivered the verse jerkily, with too little appreciation of its loveliness and a leaning to the manner of counsel making points in a brief. He had unnecessary emphases. In the line: "And make us rather bear those ills we have," he gave the word "rather" a bellying sail which it was never meant to carry, and a second later Hamlet insisted that in Ophelia's orisons all *his* sins should be remembered.

But there were undoubted compensations. All that the part has of irony was capitally brought out, and full value was allotted to the macabre. Mr. Percy gave a new turn to the words: "Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!" the intonation at the word "fool" conveying Hamlet's exasperation at Polonius carrying his doltishness to the length of being his foolish self when he ought to have been Claudius. But we did not even hear the words: "Is it the King?" When Sarah Bernhardt said: "C'est le roi!" and stood, Mr. Maurice Baring tells us, transfixed like some apostrophe in black, the whole meaning of the play was concentrated in the rippling gleam of her sword. Mr. Percy did nothing here, but he delivered the "Now might I do it pat" speech extremely finely, and was very fine also in the utter weariness which he showed at the words: "Nay, an thoul't mouth." Be it said, too, that the actor stood up to Hamlet's intellectual side, and that though his performance lacked plastic beauty it never wanted gusto. Mr. Percy obviously delighted in being Hamlet; and indeed that delight must always be present, the condition of any respectable performance of this greatest of parts being that it should resemble Mr. Micawber's reading of his letter and be carried through "with a mixture of the lowest spirits and the most intense enjoyment."

I am afraid I thought Miss Miriam Lewes quite miscast as the Queen. One felt that Hell never mutinied in that matron's bones and that she could never have looked upon, let alone have been tempted by, "the bloat King."

Mr. John Laurie's Claudius was not nearly bloat enough, and too light in texture. Miss Gabrielle Casartelli was a completely prosaic Ophelia who, in the Mad Scene, walked about the stage in full possession of her wits and the decent black of a nursery governess in a family which has just lost its master. Mr. Neil Porter had the voice but not the appearance for Horatio ; Mr. Charles Macdona as Polonius had intonations a good three hundred years too modern ; and Fortinbras, who should be vocally superb, gave his army semi-audible commands in a manner to suggest that he could not have led a choir. I think I rather liked the First Gravedigger of Mr. Wilfrid Lawson, but I am in no doubt whatever about the Laertes of Mr. Eric Portman. Laertes it was who, at his second appearance, and half out of his mind with excited grief, shocked us again into realisation that we were witnessing the greatest of poetic tragedies.

MR. AINLEY'S HAMLET

" *Hamlet* " : *revival of Shakespeare's Tragedy. Haymarket Theatre,* 22 *April,* 1930.

Of all performances of Horatio that by Mr. Godfrey Tearle in this star-clustered Birthday Matinée was the loveliest that I can remember. Horatio in the playing may be nothing, or he may be the mirror of all that is lovable in the egocentric hero. There is a great deal in Hamlet that no stretch of imagination can call " nice " ; it is Horatio's job to have sounded his friend's heart and thrown away the worser part of it. Watching Mr. Tearle, whose eye never left Hamlet and whose voice throughout touched one stop only, that of some elder brother's tenderness, one could conjure up the gentle, unalloyed spirit which Hamlet might so easily have been. There are two glimpses of this. The first is in that great hymn to friendship beginning : " Nay, do not think I flatter," and ending : " Something too much of this." Hamlet knows that the even tenor of friendship is one of the paths he is never to tread, and in this moment spills the treasures which he can never spend. The second glimpse, though it is earlier in time, is at the phrase : " For every man hath business and desire, Such as it is." I take it that this is not contemptuous and still less meaningless, and that in this phrase Hamlet takes leave of the common way of happiness. Hamlet, on Tuesday afternoon, " threw away " both passages. This brings me directly to what was fine in Mr. Ainley's handsome performance and to one aspect of it which was not fine at all —the fact that never, in my view, did the actor suggest that he was not reciting and bringing to that reciting a conscious magnificence. In place of an interpretation of Hamlet we had a display of executive virtuosity and bravura declamation which, instead of revealing the character, blinded us to it.

The quarrel, since it must be one, takes its rise in Mr. Ainley's superbity. Surely Hamlet should be to the spectator's eye that which he seemed to the Court ? Now throughout the play nobody has any inkling that Hamlet is a flaming intellect, a high-powered engine working at

terrific pressure. Only Claudius, and even he only towards the end, suspects that Hamlet is more than the dreamer everybody takes him for. Whereas if the young man had bestridden his world colossally everybody must have been " put wise " to the presence of an extremely remarkable young man. Now consider Gertrude's curt summons to her closet and her opening rebuke. Are not these any mother to any naughty little boy ? It is obvious that to everybody at court—for Ophelia's evidence is *ex parte*—Hamlet is a quite unremarkable young man. But Mr. Ainley is not unremarkable. He has commanding presence, handsome looks, fine gestures, and his famous organ voice. This Hamlet could never have been too much i' the sun ; he *was* the sun. Obviously if there was a master-mind about the place it was his. Mr. Ainley accentuated all these magnificences, and throughout assumed a pose and a mental habit reminding one of Mr. Max Beerbohm's Lord Byron shaking the dust of England from his shoes. Or one might say that he was leoninity itself, throwing off the soliloquies " like dewdrops from the lion's mane " and generally giving rhetoric an innings of three hundred not out.

Does this mean that the actor who essays Hamlet must not be well-graced ? It does not. Does it mean that the soliloquies shall not receive their meed of purple ? Again no. What it does mean is that display of the graces must not supplant the search after character, also that the purple patches must not be regarded as the building of which they are only the ornaments. In other words the actor who cannot help being a banquet to eye and ear must take more than ordinary care not to starve the mind. It was here that Mr. Ainley put us upon short commons. There is a fantasy by Mr. Milne in which, on a summer evening, the butler at a Sunningdale bungalow says to his master : " Excuse me, sir, but there's a knight in armour at the front door." His master replies : " Show him in, Timms, and bring the whisky." Mr. Ainley received the ghost with hardly more dismay, and at the words : " Angels and ministers of grace defend us ! " when his whole soul and mind should be flopping on the earth—and many actors do in fact grovel—carefully arranged his sword before dropping to one graceful knee. In the " To be or not to be "

soliloquy we were conscious, not of Hamlet finding *for the first time* words to express long-surging speculation, but of Mr. Ainley performing a cadenza. At the phrase : " The undiscover'd country from whose bourne No traveller returns," the actor drew himself up and underlined the statement, the actual fact being that a very awkward traveller, his father's Ghost, *had* returned, and that that was what all the bother was about. Mr. Ainley took the least interest that I can remember in his trap to catch the King. Hamlet, having declared " For I mine eyes will rivet to his face," did nothing of the sort, but engrossed himself with the players, and actually addressed the words " Wormwood, wormwood " to, of all people, Ophelia ! Rightly, a high-light was made of : " Is it the king ? " But Hamlet did not resolve the question, which he should do by showing on his face chagrin at gathering from the Queen's comparative indifference that it is not Claudius. Alternatively, if Hamlet is not to know the truth for another three lines the actor did not hold suspended in his face the excitement of his question. Having delivered the line, Mr. Ainley gave himself an " easy " so as to get ready for : " Leave wringing of your hands." Both passages were finely said, but not linked together. Even simple little effects went astray. For example, the words : " The air, look you," were taken in the orator's stride when they should have been a parenthesis enabling the lower-witted courtiers to know what has been meant by " canopy." Perhaps the most noteworthy thing about this Hamlet was the complete absence of melancholy, for which some well-ordered rages and a recurring smile were a poor substitute. We were given no tenderness for anybody, and even the lovely lines to Laertes : " What is the reason that you use me thus ? I loved you ever," were dry as a bone. Strange, too, that the " Nay, an thoul't mouth " speech, where any amount of ranting is called for, came poorly off. But the whole performance reminded one of a magnificent façade attached to no particular building, a procession of utmost stateliness from purple patch to purple patch without any presentation of that inner life which should knit these decorations together. There is probably no reason why Mr. Ainley should not make good the defects here

signalised, and perhaps the best way to begin would be to forget that Hamlet is a star part. Mr. Ainley has all the attributes of the great actor, but should remember that some of the genius of great acting consists in taking care that those attributes do not get between the audience and the character. Perhaps, too, when Mr. Ainley next plays the part he will see to it that the unsympathetic half of Hamlet is restored, including the passage about " the bloat king," which I have never before known to be omitted. On Tuesday afternoon the play was so cut as to render much of the characters and nearly all the latter half of the tragedy meaningless.

Miss Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies gave a lovely performance of Ophelia, as one little detail will show. At the end of the mad scene Ophelia came down-stage towards Laertes with recognition on her face. But before she could take shelter in her brother's arms her mind clouded again so that she found herself confronted by a stranger. And it was a stranger to whom she said : " God be wi' you ! " This was most touching, and if it be a part of tradition, why then Miss Ffrangçon-Davies re-created it so that it seemed new. As Polonius Mr. Herbert Waring was admirable, though he might possibly have gathered a little more wool ; and as Laertes Mr. Colin Clive, good actor though he is, could not bridge the centuries. There were some glorious pieces of miscasting. Miss Irene Vanbrugh, normally my heart's delight, will forgive me if I say that one viewed her Queen more in sorrow than in anger. Mr. Cedric Hardwicke will also, I hope, forgive the suggestion that when one wants to see Churdles Ash one visits another play. Last, I shall risk Mr. Thesiger's eternal displeasure by submitting that Osric is not the principal character in *Hamlet*. Alas that the tittering evoked by this over-mannered impersonation continued after the actor's exit and prevented us from paying any attention to Hamlet's lines about the fall of a sparrow, lines held by many to be of some beauty !

MR. GIELGUD'S HAMLET

"*Hamlet*": *revival of Shakespeare's Tragedy. Old Vic. Theatre,* 5 *May,* 1930.

To clap into't roundly, the short version of *Hamlet* now presented at the Old Vic. is the best abridgement I have ever seen of this over-long play. There used to be a nonsense tag about "the higher, the fewer." But nonsense may be the shortest cut to sense, and it is sober truth that the higher the quality of the thought the fewer the number of the words one can digest. I speak here for the normal playgoer of ordinary staying power. The pretence that all that is essential in *Hamlet* cannot be got into three and a half hours' steady going is the vilest cant. It was a convenient pretence in the old days when scenery had to be unrolled, processions unwound, and precious minutes wasted in tiptoeing at the end of the Nunnery scene down-stage to embrace in heartrending fashion the extremities of Ophelia's tresses. That this made nonsense of the King's "Love! his affections do not that way tend," was never a deterrent; it was an affecting piece of business which made very fine sense for Hamlet when the actor was determined to present that character as a model of amiability, meet for maidenly approval at matinées. In these circumstances all the late middle of the play had to go, with the result that many generations of West End playgoers have never seen a Hamlet who was not a perfect little gentleman throughout.

Mr. Gielgud's Hamlet is as good as any reasonable person could desire. One says reasonable, because the part makes demands that are unreasonable. It demands every grace of body, mind, and heart, and the power of expressing intellectual and spiritual ugliness. Hamlet, the noble heart, sweet prince, and all the rest of it, must make us feel that Horatio, bidding flights of angels sing him to his rest, came near to saying the wrong thing. There was so much that is murky churned up in that tormented brain that the demons might have been asked to lend a hand, respectfully, at a distance. Hamlet must make us cry one minute and shudder the next, and the actor who goes a little way

towards fulfilling both halves of the contract is always a better Hamlet than one who fulfils one half abundantly and the other not at all. Let it be said that though Mr. Gielgud has not quite enough pathos he knows where the occasions for pathos are, and marks the passages with the greatest sensibility. The inability to draw tears proceeds from a physical, not an intellectual lack, and is purely the affair of the larynx. Many abominable actors possess the gift in full measure, and I suggest to Mr. Gielgud that he must at once set about acquiring it. In the horrific he does better, though I think he might cut an uglier figure physically in Gertrude's closet and take some of the music out of his voice. The man is beside himself, and the voice should be beside itself also. What all this amounts to is merely that Mr. Gielgud has neither the pathos nor the dæmonism of Henry Irving; given his present machine, I do not see that he could play Hamlet better. It is at least an exploration into the character rather than an exploitation of the actor, and three-fourths of the one virtue is always better than the whole of the other vice. This Hamlet is noble in conception. It has been thought out in the study and is lived upon the stage, with the result that you feel that these things are happening to Hamlet for the first time, and that he is here and now creating words to express new-felt emotion. The performance is not actorish and the affair of repetition; this Hamlet will cease upon, and about, the midnight, and that will be the end of him. The whole part was spoken with the nicest intention, and I shall not quarrel with Mr. Gielgud because his intentions were not always mine. The words "Get thee to a nunnery" were delivered at the first time of utterance, and before Hamlet perceives the eavesdroppers, with maximum pathos as though Hamlet would draw out of that refuge its power to heal as well as mortify. The Play scene and everything that follows were taken at a terrific speed and with the right kind of nervous energy. At the words: "What, frighted with false fire?" the house was really excited, and with the genuine excitement of a crowd when a goal is scored in a Cup Final, or of the *dedans* at Queen's last week when in the tennis championship Baerlein made that miraculous, impossible scoop. From this the pace never

slackened until the "All occasions" soliloquy, when it was purposely slowed down to permit of one of the finest pieces of sheer exposition I have ever heard. Strangely enough, the rant over the grave did not quite come off, perhaps because the actor was tiring. This scene, like Othello's, "Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire" demands hardly anything except noise, and, as I judge, Mr. Gielgud did not here quite fill the big theatre. But everything after this was admirable. It should be added that the verse was spoken throughout like verse, and the whole performance conceived in the key of poetry.

Mr. Harcourt Williams's production in the Elizabethan manner was excellent throughout, though, frankly, I did not like his Ghost, which was vocally too light in colour. Is it possible that Mr. Wolfit's King, made up after the manner of Velazquez's Philip IV, looked a little too like Vandyck's Charles I in a bad temper? Miss Martita Hunt gave a thoroughly satisfying performance as Gertrude and, if she be economically minded, may at any time play Mary Queen of Scots without change of costume or head-dress. The early scenes of Miss Adèle Dixon's Ophelia were comparatively unmoving. But the later ones precipitated paroxysms, and it is not true that all the credit must be given to Shakespeare, since there have been Ophelias who have worn this rue with indifference. Mr. Brember Wills came into his own as Polonius, and a very good "own" it was. The Laertes of Mr. Francis James did very nicely; but the Horatio of Mr. Gyles Isham did not do at all, unless we are to suppose that that young gentleman had spent a recent Saturday morning rowing from Putney to Mortlake and would presently be taking the field against the Australians.

THE GERMAN PLAYERS

" The Living Corpse " : revival in German of Tolstoy's play. Globe Theatre, 26 *May,* 1930.

First, while there is room for it, let me say something about the remarkable setting to this production. The programme gives us no information on this subject, though the wise ones present wagged their heads and murmured : " Reinhardt ! " Reinhardt or no, whoever produced this play showed himself to be a master of common sense. Light and shade were used for their proper purpose, light to illuminate the things which ought to be illuminated, the actors for example, and shade to obscure that which ought to be obscured, corners of rooms, wainscoting, and so forth. The scenery was largely non-existent ; yet the little bits one was allowed to see pre-supposed the rest more realistically than a whole army of scene-painters could have contrived. When it was necessary to suggest luxury in Moscow somebody pushed forward a marble fireplace which stood out from nothing in particular, like a cottage-piano at an angle. By itself, nothing. But add three chandeliers, one behind the other, *and two actors*, and the trick was done ! When the ante-room to a crowded café had to be presented all they did was to let you see a chandelier having three tiers of four, six, and eight globes respectively. The eye has its logic as well as the mind, and eighteen gas-jets abundantly pre-supposed a large room and large company. When high life in an expensive restaurant must be set forth a single mirror, tarnished but of the right size, was all that was needed ; an arbitrary slab of noisome wall sufficed for the eating-house of the poor. In the art of making thirty shillings go a long way Herr Reinhardt has obviously no equal, though we should perhaps bear in mind that the stores from which he draws his scenery are those of the imagination. This method has its limitations, of course, since with this particular lighting people would have to breakfast at midnight ! The second scene of the fifth act in Tolstoy's play should discover the verandah of a sunlit bungalow ; Herr Reinhardt coped with this scene by

omitting it. Nevertheless, the setting to this play showed him, or whoever actually set it, to be a world-master.

Our visitors, or some of them, have the quality of their scenery : they are more real than the real thing, and this in virtue of something which for want of a better word we must still call the actor's temperament. Lacking this quality the English actor substitutes brains and technique, and so *with the aid of time* builds up a character. In the case of the player who is actor by temperament as well as art—and no actor would be tolerated on the foreign stage who was not both—the time factor is done away with, for such a player, when he steps on to the stage, is already what the less volatile artist needs time to become. All the French, German, Russian and Italian actors that I have ever seen possess this natural quality of the actor. It is by virtue of this quality that in the present play Frau Hedwig Pauly has told us all about Anna Pavlovna, Lisa's mother, before she has put the first lump of sugar in her coffee. So, too, Fräulein Charlotte Schultz has told us almost everything about Fedya's neglected wife in that first short journey between door and tea-table. Presently she begins to speak, and the emotion in view of what is to come is quite rightly only a trickle, though its volume would be accounted by any English actress as a sufficient culminatory third-act torrent. If you want a master of quietism, then I suggest that Herr Hans Schweikart, who plays Karenin, Lisa's second husband, will do to be going on with. Everybody at some time or other has had the experience of feeling the world to stand still while he takes stock of some magnificent comedian : Herr Wilhelm Diegelmann, as Fedya's drunken acquaintance and giant boor, once more provides this experience. There is no getting away from the fact that playing of this quality has not been seen on the English stage since the Russians were here, and will not be encountered again until the French arrive next week.

I have to confess that Herr Moissi disappointed me in two ways which have nothing to do with one another. First, by a reading of Fedya which seemed to me to be untenable ; and second by giving an obviously star performance, which, in the midst of the intense naturalism of the other players, had the disconcerting effect of a red-hot

poker plunged into a bucket of cold water. In fact, enormously to my surprise, and I think something to his, Herr Moissi's performance just fizzled out in a splutter of histrionics which were none the less histrionics for pretending to portray abnegation. Throughout the play Fedya's drunkenness is insisted upon, and perhaps one should realise that Moscow and Hampstead Garden Suburb are not the same place ; it may even be that in Russia physical intoxication and child-like other-worldliness are one and the same thing. Tolstoy has not made it easy for whoever has to play Fedya. He makes that, according to English notions, prating scrimshanker behave towards his wife and child in a way which Hampstead would rightly regard as mean, and then wander through the rest of the piece in a bed-gown and mask composed in the manner of the late Ary Scheffer, hinting at a moral superiority which Hampstead would rightly regard as suspect. One submits that Fedya, deserting wife and child and consorting with gipsies, though keeping the prettiest of them at a highly proper distance, is really not doing a far, far better thing than ever drunken Russian has done before, and that it is the business of the actor to show that Tolstoy's idealised saints are not easily distinguishable from practical blackguards. Perhaps it is owing to Herr Moissi's long association with Duse that he tars his world with the same ineffable brush. When Fedya sits up on the gipsy sofa he is a little cherub who has sunk down below, and throughout the play he presents facets of winsomeness like the six heads of Sir Joshua Reynolds. This actor has been praised for his voice which, as used in this part, turned out to have no middle register and to alternate between two notes only : a low whisper and a high whimper like that of topmost branches in a wind. Two notes to express one continuous mood—a sweet, sickly obsequiousness. Within that mood there were many very skilful variations of temper, which showed that in some other part Herr Moissi may be a very fine actor indeed. But he has played Fedya so often that even if the interpretation of the character be accepted the performance has degenerated into a display. When Fedya begins, the piece breaks off like an orchestra yielding place to the soloist in a concerto ; when Fedya takes a breather the piece resumes.

So Herr Moissi leaned up against the door and on the single word " Ausgezeichnet ! " executed a series of variations like a prima-donna taking her last farewell of top-notes. The result of this overplaying was that one delighted in the cadenza and overlooked the character, to the extent that the attempted suicide doubly disappointed : we had forgotten the reason for it, and did not expect it ; and when it happened it was not well done.

Nevertheless, one looks forward with renewed interest to Herr Moissi's Hamlet, for it is not possible to believe that we have yet seen the whole or even any considerable portion of this actor's art. Can he terrify or suggest a mentality older than a child's ? Can he get a good, rasping ugliness into that too-honeyed voice ? This actor is small in stature and insignificant in appearance. But his fame is great, and I should not be at all surprised if when he has got away from Tolstoy's saccharine naïvety he were to spring a surprise. For the present let me suggest that this Fedya is not a character but a bundle of showmanship of which bits are brilliant, a star-performer's projection seraphic or insufferable according to the view the spectator takes of the higher spiritualities of unwashed Russia.

HERR MOISSI'S HAMLET

"*Hamlet*": *revival in German of Shakespeare's Tragedy. Globe Theatre, 2 June,* 1930.

Dr. Johnson was once asked whether great music affected him to the point of shedding tears or running into the thick of a battle. "No sir," said Johnson, "and if it did I should not hear it." Great acting must have the effect Johnson denied; otherwise one may legitimately declare that one has not seen it. It is easy not to write tragedies in blank verse, and it is equally easy not to play *Hamlet.* The foreign player who gives this particular battle must do or die in the attempt; Herr Moissi dies. Dies, that is to say, by any standard of greatness, though he lives abundantly by the measure of competence and the knack of making the mind accept what eye and ear reject. If there is one thing certain about a great actor it is that you know him at once. When Fedya in the Russian play sat up on that gipsy sofa we were conscious of disappointment; when the curtain went up on the Court of Denmark we were again disappointed, since here stood a Hamlet possessed of every physical disadvantage. The figure was without grace—insignificant torso, thin thighs, thick ankles, the mask not tragic but ruefully comic, the hands podgy and the fingers comfortable. Hazlitt says simply about Hamlet: "There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor." But as Herr Moissi stood there he looked every inch the actor, and a particular kind of actor, the *cabotin* who has trod a hundred boards and from childhood breathed the air of playhouses. Coquelin's mask, when the actor was not playing, was totally undistinguished, parchment to be written upon or wax to be modelled. Herr Moissi has this same clayey look, the birthright and treasure of your comedian, which is what we take this German-Italian actor to be. Herr Moissi impresses us as we are impressed by an expressive puppet. Give him strings, and he would be a fine artist in Signor Mariani's collection; and for any comic actor there can be no higher praise. But from this to

Hamlet is a world away. Hamlet is a prince, or we read him so; Herr Moissi might have been some foundling adopted by Gertrude out of good nature. He had no wear of nobility and showed no sign of intellectual ascendancy, but slunk about the Court as one expecting to be snubbed. When he spoke his voice soared at once into a high servile whine. Throughout the entire piece he was, as the French say, *penaud*.

It may be argued that there is no reason why Hamlet should be, in the horse-coper's phrase, a "good-looker," that Ophelia's "The glass of fashion and the mould of form" is the mere mistress's partiality. It may be that Hamlet *in real life*, if we can hypothecate that absurdity, was like Traddles bereft of his smile. Of course all this may be. It may be that Coriolanus had the demeanour of Uriah Heep, and that Romeo was indistinguishable from a *commis* in to-day's Soho restaurant. Those who hold such a line of reasoning to be valid cannot be answered; they are philosophers, metaphysicians and what not, but no play-goers. The art of acting confesses another law: no actor, whatever his power of mind and soul, can play Henry V if he be squat or Lear if he be puny. One of the greatest actresses of all time has said in her manual of acting: "Beethoven and Berlioz, Michaelangelo and Raphael might have been club-footed; nobody would have remembered it. The dramatic artist, on the other hand, is considerably handicapped in this respect. An actor must be tall, have a good figure, an expressive and pleasing face, and nothing that detracts from the general harmony of his body. If he be under the average height he is precluded from appearing on the stage, unless he possess an extraordinary genius which would make the most exacting spectator forget the defect which nothing can overcome. Here study and the most resolute determination are powerless." And again: "An actor who is too short has no future." Coquelin was a magnificent actor, yet his nose precluded any approach to tragedy. Herr Moissi may have "extraordinary genius," but if so it is genius for the comic. He would play wistful imps and pathetic gnomes to perfection, and it may well be that his Peer Gynt is a marvel. But with all respect to our Norwegian friends Peer is not Hamlet.

The foregoing may seem a harsh judgment ; but I can only express what I feel. All works of art are hit or miss, and it is no excuse for a student who has forgotten the date of Waterloo that he could write a brilliant essay on the economic reasons for that battle. Herr Moissi obviously knows all about Hamlet ; within his reading there is every shade of meaning which the most exacting would desire to find. The character is realised, and you might even say that it is lived. But it is not *presented*, and that is the whole trouble. It is intelligent, tender, sympathetic and mean. Where this Hamlet should terrify, he is himself terrified. He is duly appalled by the Ghost, but his " Angels and ministers of grace " does not in turn appal us. The Play scene is better led up to than I can remember, but the climax, " What, frighted with false fire ? " is utterly missed. The rant over the grave goes for nothing. But everything that care and intelligence can do is done, and when, at the end, Herr Moissi comes forward to express his thanks he does this with so much charm and humility that one takes an instant liking to the little man. But one does not presume to like or dislike a great tragedian any more than one presumes to like or dislike the Alps ; they are there and so is he. There can be no doubt whatever about the extraordinary merits of the company. The opening scene between Bernardo, Francisco, Horatio, and Marcellus is played better than I have ever seen it, for when these simple soldiers see the Ghost they breathe as people breathe when they are frightened. Herr Josef Danegger makes of Claudius a bloat, rubicund, and smiling villain, rather like a Nuremberg clock-maker's toy. Frau Johanna Terwin, who is an excellent Queen, has one super-intelligent gesture in which she hints to Claudius that Cornelius, Voltimand, and Laertes are all very well, but that he really ought to pay a little attention to Hamlet. The Polonius and First Grave-digger of Herr Hübner and Herr Diegelmann are beyond praise, and I have no doubt that the Ophelia of Fräulein Hanni Hoessrich is lovely. But there is a saturation-point in Ophelias, and I have seen too many lately to be able to take in a new one. The man-handling of the text is indicated by the fact that the " Fall of a sparrow " speech is omitted ! Add that the

Claudius-Laertes plot about the poisoned rapier is left out, and it will be understood why this five-act and five-hour tragedy can begin at ten minutes past eight and conclude at twenty minutes to eleven.

MISS FFRANGCON-DAVIES

"Magda": revival of Hermann Sudermann's play. New Theatre, 12 *May,* 1930.

As I am in duty bound to scold Miss Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies for possessing the defect of the highest quality proper to any actress, let me begin by defining that quality. Briefly, it is the belief that the player can so discipline executive powers as to be able to use the whole or any part of them to carry out every conception of which his imagination is capable, plus the will to put that belief into action. The defect of that highest quality is the reluctance to perceive that expression is necessarily subject to physical limitations. "We'll e'en to it like French falconers, fly at anything we see," said Hamlet. To show with what avidity Miss Ffrangçon-Davies has flown at anything and everything she has seen, I will jot down some of the parts which she has played in the last three or four years : Maya, Tess, Cordelia, Titania, Mr. Shaw's Cleopatra, Eleonora in Strindberg's *Easter*, Juliet, Ophelia, Mrs. Herbert in *The Lady with a Lamp*, Lady Macbeth, Nora. It is unnecessary to insist upon the intellectual enterprise which this list shows, and it is not my purpose to appraise the wealth and fluidity of the achievement. My intention is rather to point to certain failures, using the word to connote the discarding of the author's character and the substitution of other exquisiteness. Ransack Marseilles from end to end and you would not find such a Maya ; this Lady Macbeth could not have looked upon a dagger ; that Tess was as far removed from the elemental creature of the soil as Dresden is from earthenware. Yet in each case disparity was made good with so much imaginative subtlety that though the senses were starved the mind was satisfied. Offer a hungry navvy nectar and ambrosia in place of his expected steak and bottle of beer and he may well think that he has enjoyed a feast without having had a meal. One repeats that the one admissible charge against Miss Ffrangçon-Davies's artistry is its refusal to recognise that her physical means are finite.

This actress cannot " look at " Magda, yet by the end of the evening she has contrived to do quite extraordinary justice to Sudermann's heroine. Remember Magda's first appearance, how it is delayed until the second act, and how the first act, though ostensibly devoted to painting the patriarchal household, is really a superb piece of working-up for the actress's entry. In the way of keeping an audience in a fever of expectation Magda has Millamant and Madame Ranevsky and Paula Tanqueray beaten to a frazzle. We hear of the great operatic star's reception at the official soirée, how she came down the room on His Excellency's arm, her corsage blazing with orders. We see Magda's little sister run to the window, and hear her describe the luminary's descent from her carriage and orb-like progress up the stairs. Then the door opens and. . . . Now, what are we to suppose a great opera-singer of 1893 looked like? The world was just hearing the last of its Lucias, Leonoras, Violettas, and all those somnambulistic, camp-following aria-mongers whose weakness of mind could have been conceivably housed, though it rarely was, in fragility of body. For better or worse the world had taken the Wagnerian turn, and large against the Bayreuth sky loomed the bulk of Venus and Brynnhilde, while mighty Elizabeths strode down giant Halls whose pillars rocked at their Greetings, and on wide champaigns Isoldas came to anchor like ten-ton lorries. Yes, the opera-singers of 1893 were, to use Lady Jane's adjective, massive. I forget how Duse accomplished Magda's entry, because one never remembers any of her entries; the stage was empty, and then Duse would be sadly, ineffably, remotely present. Bernhardt's entry combined the airs of all the Graces with the business-like efficiency of the old war-horse who had a fair notion as to how much money there was in the house. And one will never forget how in the old days that door would open and the room would suddenly be full of Mrs. Patrick Campbell, a world-ranging eagle swooping down upon little Marie, the home-keeping dove.

Miss Ffrangçon-Davies, who has any amount of brains, is obviously alive to the physical difficulty and flutters up to her comparatively strapping sister with such bravura of fan and brocade that the entry is almost covered, though it

still remains that of an opera-singer up to Micaela's weight and no more. But the trouble is not ended. There remain those impudences to her father's visitors which fell from Duse like sour benedictions, from Sarah with the cabotine's natural, slightly vulgar good nature, and from Mrs. Campbell in sheer gusto. When Miss Ffrangçon-Davies says them they are the impertinences of a little girl trying to be naughty. Vocally, too, she does not quite fill this large theatre, and the laugh which should obliterate von Keller at his proposal to keep the child dark hardly incommodes him. This business of criticism is mighty difficult. There is perfect beauty in the English Lakes, as has been sufficiently pointed out, and nobody who has not just had three weeks and twenty-nine guineas' worth of the Engadine is going to bother about the scale of our English fells. But Magda is an Alpine part, and we cannot help remembering the prowess the great climbers achieved in it. Putting recollection on one side and trying not to hear Pastor Heffterdingt's : " When you stood before me in your primitive strength," we see Miss Ffrangçon-Davies's performance for what it intrinsically is—a lovely thing. Mr. Shaw claimed for Duse that when her Magda had got over the first reception of von Keller and had time to take stock of her old lover she began to blush so that her face visibly reddened and she had to hide it in her hands. This has always seemed to me to be part of Duse's hocus-pocus of ineradicable nobility and no part of Magda, for the woman who could say to the unoffending Pastor : " I could never bear the sight of you ! " is not the woman to blush before that insignificant insect which is von Keller, though he may be the father of her child. When Miss Ffrangçon-Davies receives the man her face grows white ; and that, I think, is better. But these things are as the actress feels, for Sudermann is not Ibsen, and Magda is not a real character but a leading-lady, old school, pitchforked into a problem play, new school. To-day's self-supporting young women would tell their twaddlesome old fathers not to be silly, pat their antiquated cheeks, and run off to their antique-shops. But in the 'nineties " What shall we do with our parents ? " was a serious problem for young womanhood, and in this play Sudermann tried to make the best of the new drama and the

old heroine. That Magda could have again submitted to parental rule and consented to marry von Keller was always incredible if Magda was a real woman, though one accepted it for the sake of all the good theatricalism to follow. As we know, Magda finally refused to marry her seducer, and asked her father why he should insist upon burdening that worthy Councillor with a wife who had had other lovers; whereupon the old man had a stroke and died. The difference between Ibsen the dramatist of reality and Sudermann, the man of the theatre coquetting with the new ideas, is that Ibsen would have begun his play about ten minutes before Sudermann left off. Nearly all that takes place in Sudermann's drama would have happened before Ibsen's curtain went up. When it did, Magda would be married to von Keller, her father would be staying in the house, and not only we, but the old man, would be devastatingly shown what happens to a woman who obeys a code of morality in which she does not believe. "I did what I thought was right," says Magda. Ibsen would have shown us what comes of doing what one doesn't think right. Nevertheless, as a *pièce de théâtre Magda* wears admirably, and one still gets something of the old thrill which made all the young people of the 'nineties emerge from this play determined to run away from home, become great opera singers, and have generous flings into the bargain.

L'ENFANT TERRIBLE

"*Little Eyolf*": *revival of Ibsen's play. Arts Theatre,* 15 *October,* 1930.

The proper study of mankind is monster. Such appears to have been the maxim of this frock-coated ogre retiring behind palisade of whisker and portcullis of upper-lip to demonstrate that the goodliest-looking apples are rottenest at the core. Now it may be said of naughty ogres as of naughty children that one shouldn't encourage them, and though in the far-away 'nineties those critics who had no glimmer of what the new drama was up to reproved Ibsen amply, those who understood "the movement" outvied each other in petting and fussing its chief exponent. Of *Little Eyolf* Archer doubted whether "its soul-searching be not too terrible for human endurance in the theatre," the truth about this play being that it has a masterly first act followed by two others which, as Archer incautiously let out later, are "sheer analysis, poignant and pathetic, *but the reverse of enlivening.*" The italics are mine. Now that Ibsen has been definitely and finally hoisted into place there can be no harm in saying that nowhere else throughout the great works is dullness so rampant as it is in the last half of this play, the chasm between its two tortured souls finding its image in the spectator's yawn.

While Archer was thus whirling in ecstasy in the daily Press, Mr. Shaw was doing a similar dance in the weekly. Ibsen's disconcerting discoveries about the nature of marriage and parenthood and his digs at the people who contract both liabilities are not, said Mr. Shaw, particular to introspectives living morosely on the margins of fjords. "If you ask me where you can find the Helmer household, the Allmers household, the Solness household, the Rosmer household, and all the other Ibsen households, I reply: 'Jump out of a train anywhere between Wimbledon and Haslemere; walk into the first villa you come to; and there you are.'" Let us recall what happens in Allmers's dank villa—Ibsen insists three times upon his sister's umbrella—alleged to be indistinguishable from any in

Godalming. Allmers, a schoolmaster, marries for her money Rita, a rich young woman of an amorous disposition, who looks upon her husband as greedily as a schoolgirl looks upon chocolates. Throwing up his job, this prig spends the next ten years between Rita's boudoir and the study in which he is writing his great work on, if you please, Human Responsibility. They have a baby who, during a moment of parental transport, falls off the table and is crippled for life. The father's recompense to his offspring takes the form of a priggish moulding of the boy's character to the end, forsooth, that when he is grown up he shall finish his father's book! All this time Rita has honeyed and made love to Allmers till he can stand it no longer. So the enervated fellow goes for a holiday into the mountains, and comes back resolved that, in the future, home is going to be less of a seraglio and more of a home, a decision received by Rita with asperity. When the play opens we see the wife disgruntled with everything that comes between her and possession of her husband, with the book on Responsibility, with the boy Eyolf, with Asta, Allmers's half-sister, yet another of Ibsen's spinsters, selfless and sad in the pastry sense, with the wide open spaces and narrow mountain tops, and with her husband for listening to them. She wishes Eyolf unborn, and in answer the Rat Wife rids her of him. The rest is the parents' recriminations.

This, then, is the play which Mr. Shaw declared to be "as actual and near to us as the Brighton and South Coast Railway." How far is it still "the mercilessly heart-searching sermon, touching all of us somewhere, and some of us everywhere"? How many withers reclining patiently against the Arts Theatre Club fauteuils felt themselves to be remorsely wrung? In my view considerations of time and space, in other words dates and geography, have to be reckoned with. In the time case *A Doll's House* has no modern application because the modern Nora would simply tell Helmer to stop being daft, while in the matter of topography I have always doubted whether what is truth abroad is necessarily truth at home, whether human nature is inevitably the same among steppes and fjords, Spanish sierras and Surrey suburbs. I still doubt the applicability

of Ibsen's clammy cogitations to a country in which the sexes settle their differences by the method of mixed foursomes on the golf-links at Sunningdale. Ibsen's humour is the grimmest vestige, and only less shuddersome than his conception of passion. He deems the egotistical, vapouring Allmers resisting his predatory spouse to be the normal husband, whereas we should take the Hindhead stockbroker feverishly climbing the Hog's Back in pursuit of what Archibald Grosvenor called "the usual half-holiday" to be a very unusual husband indeed.

Other times, other manners, and we should make the same claim for other countries. A great French critic asking himself what he would feel if, by some fantastical trick of fate, he suddenly discovered that he was the murderer of his father, the husband of his mother, the son of his wife, the brother of his children, and the grandson of his father-in-law, confessed that he should feel astonishment and not very much more. I suggest that every theatre-goer who gets out of that Wimbledon and Haslemere train will feel about Ibsen's self-tormenting couple very much what Lemaître felt about the self-tormenting Œdipus of Sophocles. Such a theatre-goer will probably come to the prosaic conclusion that infants should not be left lying unattended on tables or moonstruck little boys be allowed on piers without a nurse. This will not be a whole criticism of the play because these things are only the machinery to get the real drama going, the concern of that drama being the fiendish delight with which two people supposed to be one flesh tear each other limb from limb.

But how do we fare if we suppose the drama to be particular and local instead of universal? Is it not the case that Ibsen applies his excessive cerebration to the formulating of rules for a humanity which, thank Heaven, has considerably fewer brains? Like all exorbitant thinkers Ibsen is never so happy as when he is knocking his head against one of Nature's unshakeable walls. The whole burden of *Little Eyolf* is that marriage should be a disinterested, rationalistic partnership instead of that sentimental contract whereby two people claim the power to possess and, it is alleged, so destroy each other. It is the old conflict between the laws of Nature and the niceties of Great

Thought. Blundering, sentimental, wrong-minded marriages continue to take place ; the only argument against marriage as prescribed by great thinkers is the practical one that nobody will undertake it. Nor will Ibsen consent that his characters should muddle through or jog along ; if there is an obstacle they must bark their shins. He will not let them see the road for pitfalls or allow them any use for milestones except to hang round the neck ! We, living in the twentieth century, have heard of compromise ; Ibsen's Norwegians cannot abide it. It comes to this, then, that it is a wise policy to take the art-value of the plays as cash, and leave the moral credit to the days when husbands in deer-stalkers and wives in leg-of-mutton sleeves pedalled round Battersea Park on the newly-invented safety bicycle.

The acting was of three kinds—brilliant, adequate, and praiseworthy. As Rita Miss Jean Forbes-Robertson showed the most remarkable advance in an actress's art that has ever come under my observation. She was formerly a child, playing with all a child's grace and earnestness and, by some accident of divination, rightly. She is now grown to woman's stature and has become an actress, able to play not only Cordelia but Regan, not only Viola but Rita. Her exquisite beauty and fragility remain, and, being the artist that she is, she does not try to force her portrayal of Ibsen's difficult character beyond the limits imposed by her physique. Janet Achurch made Rita a physically superb, ranting, roaring tigress. Miss Forbes-Robertson has neither the voice nor the presence for this, and she wisely softened Rita to something less than her full animalism. For the rest her performance had subtlety, power, beauty of pose and movement and gesture, of tone and phrasing, and, most important in an Ibsen play, gave you the certainty that the actress was never in intention one second behind her author.

As Asta, a noble creature who cannot help being flatter than a pancake, Miss Dorothy Holmes-Gore made the necessary sacrifices. As the Rat Wife Miss Marie Ault was Ibsen's " thin little shrunken figure, old and grey-haired " to the life. But if Mrs. Campbell was right, the Rat Wife should partly tread the floor of mysticism and

not wholly that wretched suburban carpet. Miss Ault played this supernatural part very well except that she omitted the supernatural: her Rat Wife was anybody's charlady. As Allmers Mr. Ernest Milton whined and moaned, tossed an aloof head, looked unutterable things, and, in general, resembled Bunthorne without any of that poet's innocent fun. But the character is deadly anyhow and should be relegated to the index of the unactable. As the ghastly Eyolf Master Peter Penrose, looking as if he would have been happier picking a peck of pickled peppers, acted nicely; and as Borgheim, the road-mender, Mr. Robert Speaight, wearing one of yesterday's Norfolk suits, gave the impression that he would have preferred repairing one of to-day's roads to mending this shocking part.

TALLULAH GAUTIER

"The Lady of the Camellias": by Alexandre Dumas. Translated by Edith Reynolds and Nigel Playfair. Garrick Theatre, 5 March, 1930.

Period or no period, that is the question. Sarah Bernhardt never bothered about dressing up Marguerite; she knew you would not notice what she had on. But what about lesser folk? Well, the difficulty about period costume is that it was not noticeable to the period audience, whereas to us it shrieks for attention. Miss Tallulah Bankhead, the new Marguerite, is plastered with camellias, and we reflect that Sarah never wore one. When the old Marguerite went out with the Comte de Giray we thought of Armand, with whom she ought to have been supping: on Wednesday night we forgot Armand and concentrated upon Miss Bankhead's coal-scuttle bonnet. There is a moment in the old third act, now the second, when Marguerite has written her farewell letter and decamped. Now fades the glimmering landscape—the garden of the little villa at Auteuil—on the sight, and all the air a solemn stillness holds. Of that little world nothing is left save Armand meditating on the faithlessness of Manon's tribe. Given a good Armand the scene has power. But even an actor of greater experience than Mr. Glen Byam Shaw could not, one thinks, have overcome those lemon-coloured trousers blazoned with swastikas or other arabesques. Then, again, all that is wanted for Duval *père* is that he shall be the embodiment of heavy fathers and what the French call *un homme sérieux*. Judge, then, of our affrightment when this solemn personage appeared sporting a maroon frock-coat, mauve gloves, an unconscionable amount of whisker and a badly-joined wig surmounted by a white beaver! Even the messenger was a distraction, diverting attention from Marguerite's letter by a too diverting beard. The point is a difficult one. An analogy from eighteenth-century plays will not do, because as playgoers we are used to eighteenth-century costume and forget about it five minutes after the curtain is up, whereas we are not used to

the costumes of 1850 and cannot forget them. Probably the best solution would be to under-dress the play, and so strike a convention or formalism which would suggest the past without insisting upon it. This, of course, would call for greater self-sacrifice on the part of Sir Nigel Playfair, who likes dressing up plays to the nines or even ninety-nines. His costumes are lovely, but they get in the way. His scenery, devised by Mr. George Sheringham, is charming. Nevertheless, I go back to where I began, and drop the hint that another actress was content to act the old piece with nondescript costumes for herself and troupe, and in front of the rummest collection of daubs that ever passed for scenery.

There are many different ways of playing Marguerite. There was Sarah's old way which the highbrow critics, when they had finished mopping their eyes, declared to have every fault under the sun. There was Duse's way of spirituality, wildly at odds, as Lemaître pointed out, with anything Dumas *fils* ever thought of, a spirituality which, as the 'nineties could never see, was in such a part merely "good taste misplaced." Or the actress could use Modjeska's tenderness, or the technical adroitness of a Sorel and a Nethersole. But every actress, whatever her method, must convince us that all her qualities, physical and mental, have been deployed to their fullest range to get the better of the showiest part outside the classics ever devised for a virtuoso. The wise man who is trying to give a faithful description of Snowdon will forget about Mont Blanc ; no critic called upon to account for Miss Bankhead's Marguerite will wish to make vain comparisons. He will not expect her delivery of such a line as "Les longues soirées succèdent aux longs jours!" to sound, as Sarah's did, as though each syllable were a pebble dropped into a golden well. But he will expect Marguerite to say the words as though she felt them, whereas Miss Bankhead used no more emotion than if she had been looking forward to a dull week-end. Perhaps she consciously underplayed the first two acts in view of the great demands to come. Whatever the reason, she let line after line slip by. There was no suggestion of the *grande cocotte*, of the Cyprian with all Paris at her feet yet acutely conscious of her position,

as we must believe the courtesans of the period to have been. Compare Balzac's Josépha confronted with the Baroness Hulot, and note how her abasement is exactly that of Marguerite before old Duval. The play is full of pointers to this abasement, such elaborate ones, for example, as the long speech beginning: "Ainsi, quoi qu'elle fasse, la créature tombée ne se relèvera jamais. Dieu lui pardonnera peut-être, mais le monde sera inflexible!" We know now that considered as a contribution to philosophy, ethics, and economics, the play is complete bunkum. But Marguerite does not know this, and the third act gives your first-class actress two major opportunities. First she must show Marguerite's rapture in having found what she fondly believes to be redemption in pure love for Armand. Sarah's happiness here was something to marvel at. Next the actress must show all the shock of which her being is capable on discovering that in the eyes of the world that redemption won't wash. Marguerite has had her moment of dignity with old Duval, but she knows what she is and knows that he knows; and this brings about a state of shame kin to that which the Victorian Magdalen-ridden painters were never tired of conveying to their wearisome canvases. Miss Bankhead did not touch either extremity, though her moment of dignity was good and her parting from Armand beautifully done. The actress is not born who could fail in the fifth act, and Miss Bankhead did quite competently here, though with the great cry of "Armand! ce n'est pas possible que Dieu soit si bon!" still ringing, as it always must, in my ears, I cannot tell how one should feel on hearing them mumbled into Armand's waistcoat. But speaking generally, Miss Bankhead's acting lacked style, and was too often inclined to monotony. Sometimes she seemed not to know the meaning of the words, and would say: "It had to be because it's God's will!" as though she were putting up with the weather. To sum up, I am afraid I must judge the whole performance to have been a brave and gallant attempt to cope with a part for which the actress carried insufficient guns. It is fair to say that Miss Bankhead discarded her mannerisms. Alas, that she did not find anything to take their place!

Mr. Glen Byam Shaw looked the part of Armand, but did no more than look it. Armand, as all French *jeunes premiers* know, is a part to tear a cat in, and perhaps alone of young English actors Mr. Eric Portman has the necessary *empressement.* Mr. C. V. France can never be anything but excellent, and on this occasion he emerged from the brake or ambush of his costume to put old Duval's preposterous case almost convincingly. Some of the other players were miraculously miscast. Take Olympe, for example. Olympe should be a gross beauty, devoid of mind and without any of Marguerite's natural distinction, an overgorgeous butterfly battening upon Saint-Gaudens—in a word, Manet's young woman plus a few clothes ; Miss Violet Marquesita overawed us all with a severe gentility of manner and an appearance which Miss Murdstone would not have disowned. Mr. Richard Goolden made that, by tradition, tun of man who is Saint-Gaudens a puny fellow, who to our horror allowed himself to be taken on Gaston's knee like a ventriloquist's dummy. Incidentally, the horseplay of Gaston (Mr. Harold Warrender) was wholly British. Mr. D. A. Clarke-Smith's Varville trailed clouds of Mr. Dombey, while the legs of Mr. Cecil Humphreys' Comte de Giray might have been by Leech ; on the other hand, whatever there was of authenticity in the production was supplied by the two actors last named. The Prudence of Miss Renée de Vaux was insufficiently amusing, and the Nanine of Miss Winifred Evans insufficiently touching. In conclusion it should be said that though the play interested the house there was not sufficient evidence for us to decide whether it still holds the boards. So much depends upon who treads them.

NIGGER SHAKESPEARE

"Othello": revival of Shakespeare's Tragedy. Savoy Theatre, 19 *May*, 1930.

Coming away from the theatre on Monday evening a lady was heard to say that the performance had seemed to her to be exceedingly natural. Precisely. But according to whose nature?—that of Shakespeare's Moor or of the player who enacted him? It was always said of Peter Jackson, the famous Negro prize-fighter, that outside the ring he was the essence of the unassuming. But unassumingness has never knocked a man down, and Mr. Robeson's complete failure to cope with the essential part of Othello arose from the fact that he did not assume enough. It seems foolishly necessary to insist that there is no more reason to choose a Negro to play Othello than to requisition a fat man for Falstaff. In fact, there is less reason; for while all fat men are alike in fatness there are enormous divergences of all sorts among men of the same colour. Mr. Robeson, as an extremely sensitive artist, must know the risk attending the assumption of assumingness by one of his race, and that that way Harlem lies. I suggest that he did not trust his powers *as an actor* sufficiently; he certainly did not take the risk, with the result that all that Othello ought to be throughout the first two acts he was not. "Emperor, you'se gittin' mighty low!" was this actor's climax in Mr. O'Neill's play. "General, you'se beginnin' mighty low!" summed up the first part of Mr. Robeson's Othello.

There is a modern craze which insists upon Shakespeare as so full an author that his characters permit, like those tribal lays, of any number of ways of interpretation, all of which are right. This is the pernicious anæmia of criticism. There are certain well-defined qualities which the great figures in Shakespeare must possess, or give up the ghost of those figures by being no more than their ghost. The first thing Othello must possess is majesty, a majesty compounded of pride of race ("I fetch my life and being From men of royal siege"), sovereign assurance

(" Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it Without a prompter "), and self-command (" When I know that boasting is an honour," etc.). These three points are made by Shakespeare at Othello's first entrance. But the scene also contains the extraordinarily significant line : " Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them." This is a line to be felt, not argued about ; and the feeling must be that it could only be uttered by a man of intellectual ascendancy. Writing of Salvini, the late W. T. Arnold has this passage : " The actor who does not convey the higher elements of spiritual beauty in the character does not convey Shakespeare's Othello. Tried by this test, Salvini's Othello stands sovereignly high. Nothing can be nobler than his manner to Brabantio. One who has heard Salvini knows how the ' Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,' should be said, and has gained the true conception of the way to play the scene in which Othello breaks in upon Cassio's drunken brawl. These are scenes which must be played in the grand style or not at all, and Salvini is a master of the grand style." Mr. Robeson, alas, failed not only to show mastery of the grand style, but also to indicate any idea of its existence ! He said the line with a casualness which amounted almost to the meaningless. Then when he came to : " Silence that dreadful bell," the note was one of personal annoyance. It is true that the extremely significant " It frights the isle From her propriety " could not be said because, with miraculous infelicity, it had been cut out ! One felt, however, that the line could not have come naturally from this Othello because his mind gave no indication of that passion for decorum which dictates it.

It is a commonplace that Othello, to have won Desdemona and be credited with that military career, must be a man of fine physique. Kean, said Hazlitt, was not stately enough for Othello, whom he played like a gipsy, and he goes on to talk about meridian suns, crown and turban, Eastern magnificence, and all the rest of it. In the physical aspect Mr. Robeson largely failed. Though in the mere matter of inches he towered above everybody else, it was a tower which cringed. He walked with a stoop, his body sagged, his hands appeared to hang below his knees, and

his whole bearing, gait, and diction were full of humility and apology : the inferiority-complex in a word. And so the character was drawn throughout. The great " Farewell " speech was without pathos, for in it Othello said good-bye to things for which it was impossible that he could have cared.

And now I come to the point by which every Othello must stand or fall—the quality of his jealousy. It is a mistake to regard Shakespeare's play as though it were Leoncavallo's opera or a scenario for Emil Jannings drawn to bigger scale. The personal element in Othello's jealousy is exhausted in the third and fourth acts where, in his display of purely animal frenzy, Mr. Robeson was exceedingly fine. But in the fifth act the passion rises to the heights of philosophic conception, and Othello's pain gives place to the moral affrightment that such things can be. All the world knows Coleridge's " Jealousy does not strike me as the point in Othello's passion ; I take it to be rather an agony that the creature whom he had believed angelic . . . should be proved impure and worthless." John Forster, echoing Coleridge, suggests that it is the loss not of Desdemona's love, but of his belief in the purity of the sex which opens beneath his feet " a tremendous yawning grave." This is the grave which, in Shakespeare, is always opening. It opens before Lear at his " Let copulation thrive," before Hamlet at his " Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners ? " and is discovered by Shakespeare himself in the famous " The expense of spirit " sonnet. Othello conceives Desdemona's death not as a murder but as a sacrifice, and kills her not out of passion but because her conduct has shaken the world from its propriety. The reason Mr. Robeson failed to be Othello was that he had none of this highly civilised quality. He was not " *being wrought*, perplex'd in the extreme," but perplexed throughout. He was not *like* the base Indian who " threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe " ; he *was* that Indian. " It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul ; Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars ! " is the phrase of a man familiar with the heavens. Throughout the play this Othello had his forehead bent to earth not only figuratively but literally.

But Mr. Robeson's performance had, to a quite amazing extent, the qualities of its defects. Though one may not have agreed with the plane, the performance on that plane was entirely consistent. The meeting with Desdemona after the victory had a most touching simplicity ; the third and fourth acts were rendered with magnificent power, so that Othello ceased to be human and became a gibbering primeval man ; and the last act achieved dignity and pathos. Nevertheless, I cannot agree that the passage beginning : " Whip me, ye devils ! " and ending : " Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire ! " should be *sighed* over Desdemona's body. Salvini always used to say that this was the one passage in which sound was more important than sense. The production did Mr. Robeson enormous disservice in the matter of the lighting which robbed his features of all expressiveness, and turned his face into a black, unintelligible mask. The scenery was by Mr. James Pryde, and a programme-note informed us that in order to retain the quality of Mr. Pryde's paintings no attempt had been made to light the scenes realistically. May I suggest that the first object of lighting in the theatre is not to flatter a scene-painter but to give us enough light to see the actors by ! Add the fact that nearly the whole of the play was produced up-stage and in remote corners, and we got the result that the tragedy appeared to be taking place not in our midst but in the next room. One word more. Mr. Robeson has a beautiful voice which he uses clearly and distinctly, but not beautifully, or rather, not in the way of Shakespearean beauty. Each line, as he delivers it, is a prose line made up of the rhythms and cross-currents of prose. One should not have expected anything else, for to ask any Negro actor, however great his qualities of mind and heart, to recite Shakespeare's blank verse at the first attempt is like asking an English actor to jump at once into the silver stride of Racine or Corneille. Apart from Miss Peggy Ashcroft's exquisite Desdemona and Miss Thorndike's workmanlike Emilia, the other acting was for the most part on a dismal level. As Iago Mr. Maurice Browne, whose enterprise we are to thank for this production, mis-cast himself. He trotted through the play like Jack Point in a temper, some schoolboy whipping a top,

some incommensurate gnat. The text was shockingly manhandled to the ruination of the verse and often of the meaning, Iago's motive being reduced from the phantom that it is to the shadow of a phantom. This was modesty on Mr. Browne's part, but it was modesty in the wrong place.

THE DIVINE SOPHIE

"Follow a Star": a musical comedy. By Douglas Furber and Dion Titheradge. Music by Vivian Ellis. Winter Garden Theatre, 17 September, 1930.

Presumably the only reason why anybody has ever wanted to be a dramatic critic is the urge to communicate delight. Certainly the earliest and quite the most dramatic form of criticism was when the first little boy bade his brother "come and look at this," "this" being a dead hedgehog or a live snake or something equally wonderful and exorbitant. All the screeds of all the dramatic critics amount to no more than this cry to somebody to come and look at something. But since some of the world lives a long way off and the whole of it cannot be obedient, the critic discovers a further duty—that of describing his find for those who can enjoy only through description. At once the twofold nature of the task becomes apparent. It is easy to describe how Grock added a cardboard cubit to his stature, played the piano with *papier mâché* feet, and went sliding down the lid of that instrument like an incompetent house-slater. But other people have worn those addenda and accomplished that *dégringolade*. How, then, differentiate Grock from those others and arrive at the master's quiddity? How explain in what way an artist differs from others who do the same thing? Miss Sophie Tucker adds nothing to her person which, rightly, she deems sufficiently ornate. She plays no tricks with furniture; Nature has not suggested to her any imperious need for dancing; and her most frenzied admirer would not describe her vocal accomplishment as singing.

It occurs to me that the key to this artist is to be found in the use she makes of her vocal resources, the method being to spill them all at once. So generous is the spilling that it seems impossible that exhaustion should not be reached. There is something respectworthy in recklessness of this kind, as there is in all magnoperations. No one has any regard for the niggard, the small bankrupt, the pettifogging adventurer, and it has been well said that of all gamblers the man who gambles within his means is the

meanest. Miss Tucker's lavishness demands the opposite censure. Every movement of her performance is an orgy of expense like that banquet which Fouquet offered to his royal master. But even ministers of *le Roi Soleil* could not continue in that strain, and we feel that the same fate must attend Miss Tucker. It is here that the miracle presents itself. For just as appetite grows with what it feeds on, so this artist's waste of energy creates more. And, indeed, you might liken her to an engine getting up steam, full pressure being attained at the fall of the curtain and not a second before. Mercifully she permits herself occasional indulgence in a pianissimo, though that is only to show possession of the faculty to ration exuberance. Otherwise, she scorns equally the piano, the mezzo-forte, and the forte, nothing less than four f's sufficing. Elizabeth screaming welcome to the Hall of Song, Senta drowning Atlantic breakers with a ballad, Weber's young woman apostrophising the mighty ocean and looking as though she had swallowed it, Isolda describing a dying faintness through an obliterative orchestra one hundred and twenty strong, Salome ululating farewell—all these strident ladies are, compared with Miss Tucker, the brides of quietness. Miss Tucker is wedded to Sound, to all-shaking thunder striking flat " the thick rotundity o' the world." Even her grace-notes might be described as " vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts."

But no artist can do this who lacks the physical correspondence. Miss Tucker's appearance has the necessary courage. Since this artist in the most familiar of all her numbers has bid us know " how fat girls can love," there can be no harm in saying that she owns that physical quality for which the Lady Jane chose the word " massive." But in the coming by-and-by there can never be too much of this artist, for the reason that the peculiar property and genius of her treasure is its wealth. Indeed, the opposite calamity is the more greatly to be feared, and I am not at all sure that Miss Tucker is not a little thinner than she was. It is an accident that this vaudeville performer was not an operatic singer, since she is, to adopt Mr. Shaw's description of Janet Achurch and Marie Brema, " of the broad-browed, column-necked, Germanic type . . . the type distinguished by great voices, busy brains,

commanding physical energy, an untamable impetuosity and originality." Miss Tucker has this outstanding attribute of the great player, that when she is on the stage you can no more take your eyes off her than you can off the sun when it is rising. Or you might put it that she is like one of those mountain-tops which the rising sun with sovereign eye has flattered, for her crowning glory is not only gold but like something newly and startlingly gilded. Nimbus and aureole are pale words to describe that heavenly alchemy, and her hair is always faultlessly "done."

This artist has one other attribute which always goes with genius: that of never appearing to do wrong. Away from the theatre your cold-blooded analyst might object that intonations and gestures celebrating the fearless new fashion of being the universal red-hot momma are not those which should accompany invocations to discretion. In the study one asks how the same envelope can be apt to the flaunting extravagant quean and to the maiden thrifty of her virtue. The answer is that the cold-blooded and the studious have no business in the theatre, and that when they get there they become something else. Miss Tucker is perhaps a little too big for the comedy, which proves how childishly wrong Euclid was when he denied that the part could be bigger than the whole. Certainly the artist's best moment occurs when voluminous and velvet folds descend to blot out the play, a piano emerges, and for a good half-hour it is our pastime to be bound "within the Lyric's scanty plot of ground," as Wordsworth very nearly wrote, such lyrics being distinctly un-Wordsworthian and inclining, indeed, to the Rabelaisian. The lyrics in question are, the programme informs me, uniformly the work of Mr. Jack Yellen, and I am divided between wondering whether I always caught the exact drift of Mr. Yellen's meaning or whether great art has the further quality, that it excuses the seeming unpardonable. Of the play I shall only say that it is easily the wittiest musical comedy I can remember, and that with any other juxtaposition Messrs. Jack and Claude Hulbert, A. W. Baskcomb, Alfred Drayton, and Miss Irene Russell would have shone. But Miss Tucker has many qualities, among them the gift of practical philosophy. Hamlet defied augury; this blonde Jewess invites competition, and lo! even her peers are not.